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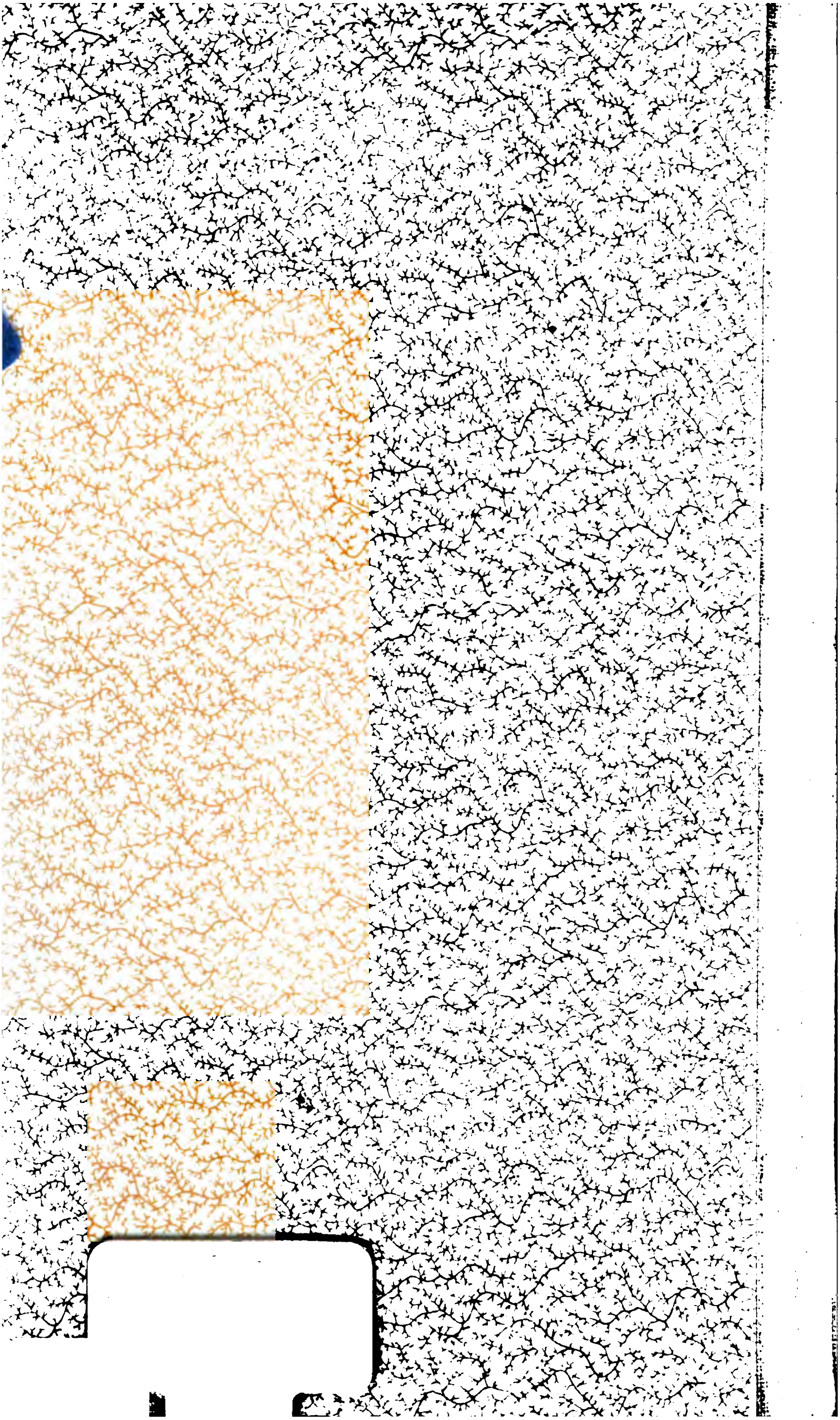

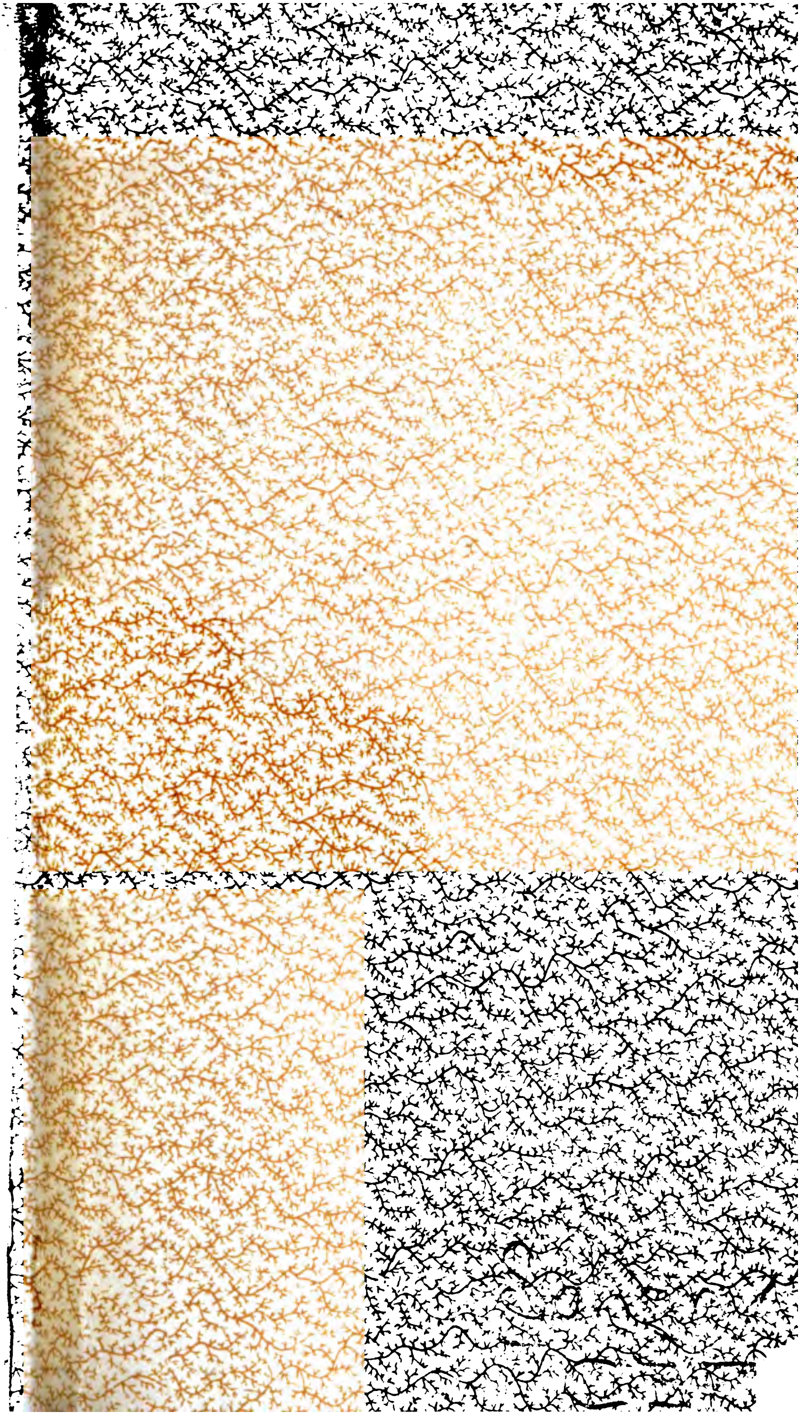

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LETTERS

ON

ENGLAND.

LETTER XLII.

Perhaps, in commencing my letters on the living English poets, I had better at once, and by anticipation, plead guilty to the charge I expect you'll bring against me, of having, in this particular, become infected with the Anglo-mania. But if I permit you to call my present sentiments and opinions on this, to me, most interesting subject, the results of any thing but sound judgment and correct taste, it will only be till I have an opportunity of laying before you, when we are together, the matter on which those sentiments and opinions are grounded. If, when I have done this fairly, you do not all of you instantly abjure the old creed, and become converts, and even devotees, to the new faith, I shall be sure that one party or the other *is*, in fact, under the influence of something like a mania; and we will, in that case, take time to consider which of the two it is.

The actual *knowledge* that exists in France on the subject of English poetry, and particularly its present state, amounts to a degree of ignorance that would be quite ludicrous, if it were not so truly lamentable: and this ignorance becomes still more painfully humiliating to us, when placed in contrast to the accurate acquaintance which every well-educated Englishman has formed with all our French writers of any celebrity. We talk of Pope, Young, and Thomson, more than they were ever talked of here while they lived, except, perhaps, the first; and as if no English poet had existed before them or since. We believe, indeed, that one Shakspeare wrote certain barbarous dramas many years ago, and called them Hamlet, Macbeth, Othello, &c., because M. Ducis has founded certain French tragedies upon these, and given them similar names; and we are pretty sure that such a person as Milton lived, and wrote a poem called Paradise Lost, because Delille has transgressed it into French rhyming couplets; and this is nearly all that we know about the matter.

As this is a subject which, besides being quite new to you, will, I am sure, be exceedingly interesting on many accounts, I shall proceed to tell you all that I have hitherto learned about it; confining myself, however, almost exclusively to the present state of English poetry. Indeed, it would not be possible for me to choose a more interesting era than the present; for there has not only been nothing like it in England, but you will be a little startled when I tell you, that I think it at least equal, if not superior, to any that has ever existed in the world. In fact, there has been nothing hitherto that can at all compare with it, only excepting the era of Elizabeth in this country: and it bears no kind of resemblance even to that; for, except Spencer, all the great poets of that age confined themselves to the drama; and at present the English have not a single dramatic writer of any genius.

The present has been called the Augustan age of English poetry. But this is not doing it justice; it is like calling Homer the Virgil of Greece; for in power, depth, and originality, the body of poetry produced in England during the reign of the present king,* as much surpasses that produced during the reign of Augustus in Rome, as the Greek poet surpasses the Latin one.

---

* George III. is meant.—Tr.

I intend to give you a slight sketch of all the living English poets who stand in the first rank; and a few of the minor ones. But before I proceed to do so, I must tell you, that for nearly all that I know about them, I am indebted to the conversation and assistance of M——. It is his favourite subject; and he has already contrived to make it mine. There has hardly been a night, since we came here, that we have not spent several hours in reading modern English poetry together. And since M—— has found that, from my imperfect acquaintance with the language, I am much better pleased, and better able to appreciate the different characteristics of the writers, by his pointing them out and remarking on them as they accidentally occur, he now always accompanies his reading by a running commentary of his own: and his are the only valuable kind of criticisms—his is the only true taste after all; namely, such as exist only for the purpose of discovering, and discover only for the purpose of feeling and making others feel, goodness and beauty wherever they exist. With him, taste is the offspring not of books but of sensibility; and that sensibility is mutually and alternately the child and parent of admiration and love —admiration the most lofty and enthusiastic, tempered and kept in awe by humble, enduring, confiding love. My gratitude, as well as my pride, induce me to repeat that, for whatever I may have to tell you of the English living poets, I am indebted to M——; for if I have not gathered it directly from his conversation, the reflections which have produced it have been suggested by hints thrown out by him. Indeed I cannot help acknowledging, because I cannot help feeling, that I owe to him my knowledge of the very existence of poetry at all, in any thing like a practical sense, and with reference to its effects on our habits of thought and feeling in actual life. I used to read poetry as I play at billiards; considering the latter merely as a less intellectual amusement than the former. I can never sufficiently thank M—— for being the cause of my discovering that poetry, in the general and extended sense of the term, is the true and living substance that I have been seeking all my life; that every thing else is but a shadow, a mockery, a dream; that *that*, and that only, can fill and people the universe of the human mind, when the (so called) realities of life leave it, as they find it, an aching void.

It is remarkable that England is as rich in living poets of a second and minor class as she is in those of the first. In this respect, as in every other connected with her poetical literature, her present era, I repeat, surpasses any other of any country. Undoubtedly there never were so many writers gifted with the true poetical spirit and temperament, living at any one time in one country, as there are in England at present. The longer I stay here, and the more I read and converse about this department of English literature, the more fully I feel myself entitled to say this without any qualification whatever. You must, however, understand me to speak of the number, variety, and value of her poetical treasures, not of the *aggregate sum* of poetical power which they evince; for, in this latter respect, the age of Shakspeare (as by the bye, it should always be called) unquestionably surpassed, in a vast degree, that of which I am speaking. In originality too, that age surpassed the present beyond any comparison. But that was probably owing less to the peculiar conformation of the minds of the poets of that day, than to the circumstances in which they were placed. There never *can* be such another age as that of Shakspeare, in point of originality and actual creative power, till the world has undergone another ten centuries of darkness, and is just emerging from them.

The English poets of the present day seem justly to appreciate, and deeply and sincerely to love and reverence, the great spirits of that age; and, doing so, the wonder is how they could contrive to avoid, so much as they have done, the appearance of imitating them. In fact, the poetry of the present day, in England, is the legitimate *offspring* of that which preceded it; but with a character and attributes purely and peculiarly its own. Its resemblances and differences are those which belong, in the sister art, to an imitation, not a copy. It resembles the poetry of the age in question, by being constructed on the same principles with that; principles originally discovered and exemplified by the writers of that age. It differs from its predecessor, in being devoted to different subjects, and called forth and modified by a different state of manners and society. But it appeals, in all things, to the same essential and unchangeable qualities of our universal nature; and it tends to the same noble purposes. It is a conscious and advised *return* to the inexhaustible fountain of nature for supplies; as that was a spontaneous and involuntary gushing out from the same fountain. They are the same living waters, possessing the same healthful and fertilizing principles, but taking different forms, colours, and directions, according to the nature of the different channels through which they pass.

Though it seems pretty generally admitted among the poets themselves, and the poetical critics of England, that Wordsworth and Byron possess a higher degree of genius than any other of their cotemporaries, it is not so generally decided which of these two poets is entitled to claim the supremacy. It is a point which should not, and, perhaps, cannot be determined, till each of them have produced some one complete work—which neither of them has yet done:—Wordsworth's only poem of any length being professedly nothing more than a part or specimen of another: and Byron's being all, more or less, studies, fragments, desultory sketches, thrown off as it were to lighten the weight of poetry which seems to press upon him as a burthen rather than a blessing.

It is not possible to conceive of two human beings more diametrically opposite to each other in almost every thing than Wordsworth and Byron: in their theories of poetical power—in the view they take of the nature and destiny of man—in the reflections which are excited in them by the powers and operations of their own minds—in the thoughts and feelings with which they look into the dim and mysterious mirror of their own hearts, and the external world that is around them—and, above all, in the uses to which they apply that theory, and those views, and reflections, and feelings, in their capacity of public writers. Looking at them as poets, we are not concerned with their personal character and habits; otherwise they are still more unlike in these than in all the rest.

Wordsworth is all contemplation, and Byron all passion; or in the one, passion seems to be perpetually hushed to sleep in the arms of contemplation, and in the other, contemplation for ever strangled in its birth by the throes of passion. Byron's poetical character exhibits the very essence, the concentration of all the powers and attributes of man—a personification of our *human* nature, in all the shadows of its gloom, and in all the light of its glory.—Wordsworth would almost seem to be an incarnation of some loftier and less earthly nature, permitted for a time to sojourn in this lower world, in order to teach man the possible purity and grandeur of his destinies, and beckon him onward to deserve and enjoy them. The one pierces the depths of our mortal life, or where he cannot pierce, *digs* downward to them; and in his way, if he sometimes meets with a vein of the richest metals, or opens a mine of the most precious treasures, as frequently breaks in upon the confines of the hidden waters, which rush upward and threaten to overwhelm him; or lays bare a passage through which the central fires burst forth, scorching and consuming all within their reach. The other sits upon a throne of clouds, midway between earth and the empyrean, and, with a look of calm contemplative wisdom, watches the motions of the loftiest star above him, or the growth of the meanest flower beneath, with emotions of equal admiration and love; and, by shedding the light of his pure countenance on the whole universe of the senses and the heart, betters and beautifies it all.

Each of these great poets may be said to dwell apart from the world, in a temple and a kingdom which has been created and peopled by himself; and in which, each is a priest and a monarch, possessing undivided and uncontrolable power. But there is an eternal gulph between these kingdoms; and while the one worships in a sanctuary redolent of the sweetest and richest incense, or sits throned on an eminence, over-canopied only by the sky, and clothed in the pure effulgence of heaven, and where no sounds are heard but celestial harps, tuned to perpetual hosannahs of praise and thanksgiving,—in the other there is no sanctuary but the grave—there ascends no incense but sighs—the throne is a rock for ever beat upon by the waves of the ocean, and overhung by shadows and darkness, in the midst of which the monarch sits, wrapped in the lurid flames of a Pandemonium —and no sounds are heard but the eternal dashing of the waters, mingled with "weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth."

I shall speak more particularly of Wordsworth first; because, for my own part, I have no doubt whatever that he is, in all the best senses of the word, a greater poet than Byron; and that while *he*, under any conceivable circumstances, *must* have been a poet, Byron, if he has not been made a poet *by* circumstances, might have been prevented by them from being one: in fact, that Wordsworth became a poet by the immutable will of Nature, and without the power of becoming otherwise; but that Byron has been made a poet by the resistless strength of his own passions and his own will.

The poetry of Wordsworth is, perhaps, more purely and exclusively *intellectual*, than any other of the present, or perhaps any age, or country—the farthest removed from the influence of bodily temperament—the most in the spirit, and the least in the blood. If, therefore, it has less than some other poetry the appearance of proceeding from direct and immediate inspiration, it is precisely because the springs of it are more deep-seated and recondite. Perhaps, for the same reason, it is more original than almost any other, with much less of the mere appearance of being so. It does not startle us, like a meteor; but like a planet, calmly holds on in its appointed course among other stars, never turning aside to the right hand or to the left; so that unless we *look for it*, we do not find it. Wordsworth's poetry depends, too, for its very existence, on certain essential and unchangeable qualities of our human nature—qualities which may be, and for the most part are, dormant in certain states of society; but which can never be totally extinguished in any state. It is to these qualities, in particular, that it addresses itself. This, too, in a great measure accounts for its want of popularity in the present day; and, at the same time, for the extraordinary enthusiasm and delight with which it is regarded by the few who do appreciate it justly. This, and its purely intellectual character, are beautifully exemplified in the effect it produces on the class of readers I have just mentioned, when they come to the perusal of it immediately from, or during their intercourse with, the actual world of common life. It seems like inhaling the pure atmosphere of their native spot, blended with the breath of herbs and flowers, after having been mewed up in the smoke and stench of a great commercial city. It soothes and refreshes the restless and exhausted spirits, allays the fever of the heart, and, as if by a magical charm, restores the mind at once to health and vigour, bringing back to it all the powers and attributes of its youth. And this, after all, is the true end and value of poetry: not to endeavour to make the mind what it was never intended to be, and therefore never can be; not to lift it to an elevation at which it cannot sustain itself; but to restore it to what it has been, or lead it to what it may be, or keep it what it is. This is the one grand and perpetual aim of Wordsworth's poetry,—its aim and its attainment: to develope and illustrate the nature of man, as it exists inherently, and independently of the conventional forms of society; thereby to reclaim the spirit from any accidental degradation into which it may have fallen, or to sustain and support it amid scenes and circumstances ill-adapted to its nature; and at the same time, to hold it back from vain and mischievous endeavours after a state of impossible purity and grandeur. And nothing can be more precisely adapted to the attainment of this noble purpose than the powers, habits, and acquirements which this poet brings to his task. He has an imagination more contemplative than practical, more profound and comprehensive than active and intense; a sensibility more universal and sympathetic than it is piercing or vivid; a fancy more clear, and rich, and temperate than sparkling or vivacious; stores of knowledge more selected with reference to certain views and feelings, than universal and desultory, and so arranged as to be always ready and available at the moment when they are needed. Add to these, habits of perpetual self-examination, coupled with the power to call up at will the past, and confront it with the present, wringing from each, or from both united, oracles and prophecies of the future:—the whole of these attributes, crowned and confirmed by a life of almost ideal purity and consistency,—give us a character which, perhaps, comes nearer to our abstract notion of A POET, than any that modern times have seen, with the exception of England's Milton alone.

Indeed, Wordsworth seems, from the first moment of the developement of his mental existence, to have felt himself called upon, and singled out from among his contemporaries, to be a guide, and guard, and teacher, not to them alone, but to their latest posterity. And the consciousness of this eminent distinction, instead of combining with self-love to engender vanity and presumption, has only served to fortify the resolves of this pure and lofty-minded man, and impelled him to direct the whole course of his education (I mean the whole discipline of his mental powers and habits) to this one high and inspiring end.

There is another very peculiar characteristic of

Wordsworth's poetry; and in which it differs from almost all other poetry that I have met with. It is not a beauty that we fall in love with at first sight. It resembles one of those divine female faces that we do not at first *see* the divinity of—we only *feel* it. It's charms glide, imperceptibly at first, into the recesses of the heart; and, settling there by the mysterious sympathy which they maintain with their distant source, impel us from time to time to recur to that source; and at last we gaze and gaze, till what was only a mere liking, grows and ripens into a full, deep, and absorbing passion. This peculiarity is exactly described by Wordsworth himself, in what he says of a character that occurs in one of his most beautiful poems. After saying that:

> "He is retired as noontide dew,
> Or fountain in a noon-day grove;"

(that is, he must be *sought* before he can be found) he adds

> "*And you must love him e'er to you*
> *He will seem worthy of your love.*"

And, in fact, Wordsworth's poetry, in a great majority of its admirers, will be found to have created the very medium by and through which it is seen—to have produced the very faculties and spirit by which it is felt and appreciated: though the rudiments of this creation must have pre-existed (whether felt or not) as inherent qualities of our nature; not as the statue is said to pre-exist in the block of marble, for that is a mere sophism,—but as the forms which define that statue pre-exist in the mind of the sculptor, transferred thence by the senses from the external world.

Wordsworth's chief poem is called "The Excursion;" and though it is of considerable length, it is given to the world merely as a portion of a much longer work on "Man, Nature, and Society." All the other works of this poet, which consist of numerous short detached pieces, profess to bear a reference and relation to this great one, to which they are intended to be subservient, and to develope and illustrate the same views and principles. These latter are my favourites; for I confess I have not yet given enough continuous attention to his great poem, to enable me to appreciate and enjoy it properly. And, indeed, I find that I derive much more benefit and delight from the perusal of these short poems, when I regard them merely as pure and unpremeditated effusions of passion, or imagination, or fancy, or sensibility,—each being a complete whole in itself. But this, perhaps, arises from my not having yet had an opportunity of *studying* them, with reference to the peculiar views of their writer. To my mind these two volumes of short detached pieces contain a treasure of poetry, which, for variety of power and of beauty, cannot be any where paralleled among the same class of writings. They seem to me to exhibit a choice of almost every degree of excellence in every kind, according to the mood of mind in which the reader may come to the perusal of them; from the purest simplicities of external nature, and of actual pastoral life, up to the most lofty and imaginative communings of the spirit of the poet with that of the universe;—from the simplest movements of fancy and feeling, sporting with the external forms and influences that every where lie about them, up to the most subtle and passionate interpretations of the most obscure and hidden oracles of the heart and mind. In one page we are presented with living pictures of a cluster of daffodils dancing in the breeze, or a daisy with its pink and white coronet peeping from out the grass; and in another we listen to the speaking echo of the stock-dove's murmur, or the cuckoo's voice. *Here* we are called upon to watch the first openings and indications of the intellect and the affections in earliest childhood, or their developement and modification under the influence of external objects during boyhood; and *there* to sympathize with the first gusts of youthful passion, or the full yearnings of the matured affections. This moment we are joining in high and holy anthems, breathed forth from an exalted intellect, exulting and glorying in its power, its freedom, and its happiness; and the next we are led astray after the wanderings of a bewildered spirit, or stand trembling at the agonies of a guilt-stricken conscience, or sigh and lament over the wailings of a bleeding and broken heart.

But I find I must leave off talking of this writer at once; for there is no end to it, unless one is determined to stop. And if I go on too long, I am afraid I shall lose the proper inclination, to say nothing of the ability, to do justice to the other great poets of the present day in England. And some of them deserve our admiration at least as much as Wordsworth does; though perhaps there is no other who takes such full and firm hold upon our love—none to whose guidance we so confidently and cheerfully surrender ourselves—none whose sway over the mind is so completely fixed and confirmed by the free and united consent of the reason, the affections, and the will.

Before quitting this poet, perhaps I ought to mention the controversy that still exists, as to his system of poetical language and versification. But I feel that these are points on which I am not at all able to judge, even for myself. I do not think a foreigner ever can be. The truth is, all that *I* find in Wordsworth is nature, and passion, and poetry; and where these exist I do not care to look for any thing else

V. S.

LETTER XLIII.

It is a week since I sent to you my first letter on the English poets; for I needed to pause a little before I attempted to tell you any thing of Byron, after I had been thinking and writing about Wordsworth. And yet I don't know how it is, but, since I have become acquainted with these two poets, I can never think of the one without the other. I seem to have formed some arbitrary association between them in my own mind, so that the name and attributes of the one always suggest to me those of the other; just as the moon always reminds me of the sea, and the sea of the moon: and the illustration is perhaps not inappropriate; for while the one of these poets is a placid moon, changing in appearance, but always the same, and moving majestically along in its appointed path through the clear blue sky of intellect, the other is a mighty vessel, without rudder or compass, tossed hither and thither on the dark and stormy sea of passion.

Though the works of Lord Byron afford matter for speculations in the highest degree interesting, yet the examination is not unattended by pain. We look into the depths of his poetry, or rather of his heart, (for it is *that* that he lays bare before us), with something of the same kind of feelings with which a traveller may be supposed to stand on the brink of the crater of Mount Vesuvius, and look down into the gulph beneath; we experience the same mingled emotions of awe, terror, and curiosity.

Lord Byron is the grandest of egotists. He carries this to a pitch of poetical sublimity. SELF supplies to him the place of all things: of name, and home, and country; of law, of love, of religion; of friends, of kindred, of mankind. It is to him all in all. It is at once his subject and his inspiration. He seems through it to enjoy a kind of double existence,—his egotism being so intense that it enables him to *go out of himself*, for the purpose of communing with and contemplating himself. The abstract idea of SELF seems to have grown with his growth, and strengthened with his strength, till it has not only filled his own imagination, but, (as it appears to his morbid and over-active faculties,) the whole universe. It is never absent from his thoughts. It follows him at all times and in all places: sometimes like a guardian angel—more frequently like a haunting demon—but always with its feet sunk in the earth, and its head above the clouds.

For myself, I have no doubt that there is something of bodily as well as mental *disease* in all this. Perhaps we most of us remember to have felt, in those feverish dreams which sometimes occur between sleeping and waking, a sensation as if we were growing too large for the bed, and even the chamber, in which we are lying. Lord Byron seems so little able or willing to struggle against this morbid feeling, that he will, at last, fancy himself too large for the globe on which he lives; and will be afraid to stand up and look about him, lest he should topple over the side of it! But he must one day or other awake from this dream; and then he will find that one human being can be greater than another only in proportion as he is wiser, and better, and happier.

A truly great poet should resemble that fabled creature which is said to take its colour from that of the object on which it looks; for ever changing *itself* with its change of place. Such was the character of Shakspeare's genius. He seemed to have no personal identity at all. Such is not Byron's; but directly the reverse. It casts the hue of its own thoughts and feelings on every thing that comes within the reach of its ken; so that nothing but ITSELF can be permanent. Beauty and deformity, truth and falsehood, virtue and vice, become mutually and alternately their opposites; they are something, or any thing, or nothing, just as it may happen.

If this is fatal to the very highest kind of poetry, it gives us something in its place which is deeply and fearfully interesting. If it does not enlarge and exalt the mind, at least it stirs and agitates it. If it cannot lighten the burthen of our humanity, at least it teaches us to bear it with a proud and indignant patience. If it does not impel us to deserve and to obtain the love and respect of our fellow beings, at least it enables us to scorn and contemn them. If it has not the power to bear the soul upward on "airs from heaven," at least it can hurl and hurry it along on "blasts from hell." In short, if it canot help us to be good and happy, at least it can teach us to gloat over and glory in our guilt and misery. And all this certain parts of Byron's poetry do—all this, and a great deal more: at least for a certain time. Whether or not other qualities of it compensate for and counteract this, is another question. I shall not deny that I think they do; or at least that they are adapted so to do; which is, perhaps, all that can be demanded. I believe that, upon the whole, a sound and well-regulated spirit may find in Byron's poetry a perpetual source of the profoundest meditations on the moral nature of man, and the loftiest aspirations as to his final hopes and destinies. I am sure that this *may* be found in it; but I tremble to think how seldom it *is* found. One thing is certain, however; that Byron's poetry *will* not be read for mere amusement. It must and will be doing either good or harm. It cannot exist in a state of inactivity.

When I say that *self* is Byron's subject and inspiration, you must not suppose me to mean that this is actually the sum and substance of his poetry. I cannot help thinking that, in endeavouring to give others a vivid and distinct idea of any object which they have never yet contemplated, it is not only allowable, but even necessary, to exaggerate the distinguishing features of it, in order to impress *them* in particular upon the mind. For how else can words hope to supply the place of things? how else can shadows represent realities? All I mean to say, is, that the above is the grand characteristic of his poetry; that in which it differs from all other poetry—the pervading and dominating spirit of it. But this quality is accompanied by numerous others, which, though they as it were *choose* to act in subservience to this one, are yet highly valuable in themselves, and without which his writings would not be *poetry* at all. Any one, of moderate acquirements, and in the habit of arranging his thoughts in metrical language, may describe strongly what he feels strongly: I speak of actual feeling arising out of actual circumstances. But this will not be poetry, however strange and romantic the circumstances may be, or however powerful the emotions arising out of them; though it may become so, by being passionately blended and interfused with the sublime or beautiful imagery of external nature, the workings of the imagination, or the play of the fancy. And *this* is what Byron does for his own thoughts and feelings. They, and they only, are, (in the language of a sister art) his *theme*; which, through whatever *variations* it may run, is always to be traced and distinguished. It is as if a musical composer should, in the commencement of his career, hit upon a melody which takes such entire hold and possession of his imagination and his heart, that he unconsciously makes it the *subject* of all his future works. It may be more or less apparent in some of them than in others; but there it *is* in all.

Take an example, the first that occurs to me, of the manner in which this poet blends himself with Nature, and, as it were, *melts himself into poetry*. His chief work, the Pilgrimage of Childe Harold, is nothing more than an account of his own travels, and his reflections arising from the objects presented to his observation during the course of them. The Third Canto opens at sea. The traveller, awaking from a dream of the home which he has just quitted, finds himself

> "Once more upon the waters! yet once more!
> *And the waves bound beneath me, as a steed*
> *That knows his rider!*"

What a sublime piece of egotism is here; as if the mighty waters were conscious of *who* was upon them; as if there were a community of feeling between *him* and the multitudinous ocean! This is an example of precisely what I mean, when I say that self is this poet's subject and his inspiration.

Though almost all Lord Byron's poems have something of a dramatic form, and though the most characteristic of them all is a drama, regularly divided into acts and scenes, yet the genius of the poet himself is essentially *undramatic*: as you will perhaps have already concluded from what I have said. In fact all that I have said of the reflections, descriptions, &c. which occur in his writings, is, I think, true in a still more striking degree of his delineations of character. So far from being able to go out of himself, (except for the purpose that I have spoken of above), he seems to be compelled, by a necessity of his nature, to infuse his own individual soul into every character which, in his capacity of a poet, he creates. So that, instead of possessing any distinctive qualities of their own, they think, feel, talk, and act just as *he* would have thought and felt, and talked and acted, under similar circumstances.

I am almost afraid my letter will be too long, if I attempt to exemplify what I have thus far said of this poet, by an examination of the drama which he has produced. And I doubt, too, whether an examination of it, for this particular purpose, will not, for the moment, greatly impair and deteriorate some of the inimitable beauties which it contains. But nothing can destroy those beauties. And the speculation itself, supposing the foundation of it to be true, is very curious and interesting.

The subject of Manfred is something similar to that which has been chosen by two celebrated

German poets, to concentrate and pour forth all their powers upon. The scene is laid among the mountains of Switzerland. Manfred is a Swiss nobleman, who is represented as having committed some fearful and mysterious crime, which is only hinted at; and, being perpetually haunted by the remembrance of it, he seeks a remedy and a refuge from the hell of his own thoughts, in a forbidden search into the hidden secrets of Nature; till at length, by mingled study and penance, he has obtained a sovereign mastery over all the powers of the visible and invisible world, and the spirits which represent them. The drama opens just as he is about to put to the test this fatal acquirement. The scene is in a chamber of his own castle at midnight. Manfred is discovered, by the light of a single lamp, breathing forth a deep and solemn dirge over his dead happiness, and the total and absolute desolation which has surrounded him, since the commission of the crime to which he alludes; which, as it should seem afterwards, was an incestuous passion for his own sister, who has perished by her own hand. As the clock strikes midnight, he proceeds to his task of calling up the "spirits of the unbounded universe." He adjures them first by "the written charm" which gives him power upon them; but they do not come: then by the name and attributes of him who is chief among them; but still they refuse to appear: in an agony of impatient indignation, he is forced at last to compel them *by the curse that is upon his own soul:* and *then* they obey him! What is this, but a sublime identification of the poet himself with the united spirit of the universe? What, but a reflection of his own fierce and stubborn nature—his own unconquerable will—unconquerable but by the absolute necessity of his destiny, which lies like a curse upon him? The poet puts *himself* in the place of these spirits, and will not yield to any power less peremptory than that which he attaches to the abstract idea of destiny itself: and even that must come to him in the shape of a curse! That this is not too fanciful a view of the subject, is, I think, confirmed by what follows in the same scene; and also by what these spirits themselves say of Manfred afterwards, or of Byron, which is the same,—for there is no separating this poet from any of his heroes, as it regards abstract character. In a most extraordinary scene in the Hall of Arimanes, one of the spirits, witnessing the tortures of Manfred, and how he makes them "tributary to his will," exclaims,

> "Had he been one of us he would have made
> An awful spirit."

He *is* one as it is.

But to return. At this last adjuration, a large star appears at the end of the gallery, and the voices of seven spirits are successively, and at last collectively heard, offering him their obedience. To their demands as to what he seeks, his reply is in one word, "Forgetfulness." They ask of what? "Of that which is within me—Read it there." They offer him all positive powers and attributes that he can ask—but *this* they have not. Still his reiterated demand is "Oblivion, self-oblivion." But they have it not; and he indignantly dismisses them; first, however, desiring to behold them face to face. They reply, that they have no visible forms, but will appear in any form that he may prescribe. He will not prescribe a form; for to him all are alike hideous or beautiful; but he bids the most powerful among them appear at once. The spirit then arrays itself in the form of *Manfred's own thoughts*—appearing as Astartè, the dead object of his guilty love! This is exceedingly subtle; but it is the subtlety, not of nature, but of passion, brooding over its own morbid abstractions. Manfred attempts to clasp the figure, it vanishes, and he falls senseless; and then a voice is heard pronouncing an incantation or curse, with which the scene closes. This curse is another most striking and fearful exemplification of what I have said, respecting the peculiar character of Byron's genius.

It is not at all appropriate, or even intelligible, in the place which it occupies; but taken as a poetical confession of the mysterious agency which the blended powers of external nature, society, and his own diseased thoughts, have exerted upon the spirit of the poet himself, it becomes intensely interesting. Viewing it in this light, I take this incantation to be, as a detached piece, one of the finest and most characteristic of any that occur in all his works.

But I will not carry this inquiry farther; at least in this spirit. It would occupy too much of your time. Besides, I am not at all sure that it is not much too fanciful; and I *am* sure that it is much too exclusively in the spirit of *criticism*. As the drama of Manfred, however, is (whatever may be their source) full of the most powerful and passionate beauties, I shall conclude my account of it; though without any reference to the foregoing speculation.

The second scene is upon the mountain of the Jungfrau, where Manfred is discovered alone, pouring forth the wailings of his bleeding and baffled spirit. The last scene had exhibited the labours of long years of penance and study, turned, in a moment, into dust and ashes. He finds that his spells are powerless, except to give him all that he *does not* want; so that even the desperate hope which had accompanied his quest after superhuman aid, has now left him, and he is more utterly desolate than ever. Abandoning, and therefore abandoned by Heaven, it is in vain that he flies to Nature. She cannot help him. "My mother earth!" he exclaims,

"And thou fresh breaking day, and you, ye mountains!
Why are ye beautiful! I cannot love ye.
And thou, the bright eye of the universe,
That openest over all, and unto all
Art a delight—thou shin'st not on my heart."

And again,—

"Beautiful!
How beautiful is all this visible world!"

Alas for him! he *sees* how beautiful it all is; but he can never again *feel* it. In this agony of spirit he calls upon the surrounding ice-crags and avalanches to fall and crush him; and at last determines to seek the boon of "Forgetfulness" in the only region which he has left unexplored — that of Death. But while he is in the act of throwing himself from the cliff, a chamois-hunter appears and prevents him, and they descend the mountain together. The two first scenes of the second act are chiefly occupied with passionate blendings of the spirit of the poet with the influences of the external world; which Manfred, by a fine creative act of the imaginative will, is supposed to call up before him, in the bodily form of a beautiful female, whose aid he appears to seek, while he knows that it cannot avail him. These scenes are filled with the most splendid descriptions of mountain and valley scenery, mixed with the profoundest reflections on the nature of the sufferer's mental malady, and the most subtle developements of its causes and effects. At length, growing sick and sated of this colloquy with any thing but his own thoughts, he dismisses the Spirit of the Alps, and descends again into himself; and the scene closes with his determination to try the last resource of his art, and *call up the dead.* The scene immediately following this, consists of some fantastic and incoherent writing, which is put into the mouths of the Destinies who attend on Arimanes, prince of the Earth and Air, as he is called. This scene is most strangely disfigured by some political allusions to late events, and is altogether misplaced and gratuitous. But the second act is closed by a scene which is by far the finest in the drama. It takes place in the hall of Arimanes, who is seated on his throne, surrounded by his subject spirits, who are employed in singing hymns of praise and homage to him. The Destinies, and Nemesis herself, are then introduced, worshipping and glorifying him; thus swelling and aggrandizing in our imaginations the idea of his boundless power, in order to enhance that of Manfred—which, as it appears afterwards, is still deeper and more resistless. Manfred now enters, and to the astonishment of the assembled spirits, refuses to bow down before their lord and master. After a sublime colloquy between him and the Destinies, the first of whom claims him as her own, and offers to protect him from the indignation of the rest, he speaks the purport of his errand, and bids them "call up the dead—call up Astarté." Nemesis demands to know if it is the will of Arimanes that the wishes of Manfred shall be complied with. Arimanes answers "Yea." (This one word, and "Spirit, obey this sceptre!" are all that Arimanes utters during the whole scene.) Nemesis then pronounces a spell, and the phantom of Astarté rises, and stands in the midst. Manfred looks at her for an instant; but is so overpowered by passion and remorse that he cannot speak to her; and he bids them command *her* to speak, and say if she condemns or pardons him. Now follows what seems to me to be the aim and consummation of this wonderful scene. I must give you a small part in the words of the drama.

NEMESIS.

"By the power which hath broken
The grave which enthrall'd thee,
Speak to him who hath spoken,
And those who have call'd thee!

MANFRED.

She is silent,
And in that silence I am more than answered.

NEMESIS.

My power extends no further. Prince of Air!
It rests with thee alone—command her voice.

ARIMANES.

Spirit, obey this sceptre!

NEMESIS.

SILENT STILL!
She is not of our order, but belongs
To the other powers. Mortal! thy quest is vain,
And we are baffled also."

At this Manfred himself addresses her in a long speech, every line of which beams forth the most resplendent beauties; and at every pause the most affecting and pathetic effect is produced by the reiteration of the words "Speak to me!" At length he stops; and THE PHANTOM SPEAKS!—Mark the host of associations which are here clustered round our idea of the triumphant power of mere human love! Polluted and guilty as it is in this instance, it is stronger than any thing, or than all things beside; it accomplishes what nothing else could! Astarté repeats Manfred's name—pronounces a few words predicting his death on the morrow, and then bids him "farewell!" He entreats for one word more, to know if they shall meet again, and if he is forgiven: but she only reiterates her "farewell." At length, no longer able to controul the flood of passion that is within him, he dares to ask if *she still loves him?* At that the phantom pronounces his name, and vanishes—Nemesis tells him that her words will be fulfilled—and he returns to the earth. As I am not acquainted with the German dramas in the original, of which I have heard so much, I would not speak or think too hastily; but I doubt if the whole conception and execution of this scene is equalled by any thing of the kind in existence. The remainder of the drama, until the last scene, is occupied by Manfred's preparations for his predicted death, and by a reluctant but respectful conference with the abbot of a neighbouring convent, who, led by the reports that are abroad, comes to try to reconcile him—

"With the true church, and thro' the church to heaven."

The abbot's interference is calmly but firmly rejected; and after pouring forth a solemn and majestic farewell hymn to the setting sun, he retires to the interior of a lonely tower at some distance from his castle, to wait the final consummation. Here, at the very moment that his life is beginning to ebb from him, the abbot again enters, determined to make one more effort to save this noble sufferer. Manfred in vain warns the holy father to retire; and he directs his attention to a dusky and indistinct figure, which at this moment rises from out the earth; and which both Manfred and the abbot question as to the purport of its mission. Its reply is addressed to Manfred—"Come! come! 'Tis time!" The rest of this noble scene, till the death of Manfred, is in exact keeping both in thought and execution, with that in the Hall of Arimanes. Manfred, though from the prediction of Astarté he knows that his death-hour is at hand, indignantly denies and contemns the claim and power of the fiend; who then calls up a host of his fellows. But Manfred spurns, scorns, and defies them all. And at last, after fruitless endeavours to induce him to resign himself to them, *they disappear;* thus implying and confessing that they have no power upon him, and never had. Manfred then takes the hand of the abbot, and expires; thus, by his last action, betraying a faint glimpse of hope in the midst of his despair. And here the drama closes.

When I think of the intense and absorbing sense of moral power which pervades and is the ruling principle of this drama—the highly poetical and imaginative bodying forth of the invisible attributes and influences of the visible world as they affect the soul of man—the resplendent beauties of some of the descriptions of external nature—the deep pathos, and the devouring passion—I am afraid even you would think me extravagant if I were able (which I am not) to express the awe and admiration I feel for the mind which could produce this and the other works of Lord Byron: for whatever is true of this, applies in a great degree to them; except that here the passion is of a more imaginative character, and the views of the moral nature and destinies of man are more exalted and ennobling; while in his other works there is more variety, vividness, and reality. I shall therefore leave you to gather the sum of my admiration of his poetry from what I have already said; adding only a few words on his general poetical qualifications, and on the modifications they seem to have received from his personal character.

Certainly the reach of Lord Byron's imagination is limited; but within the range of those limits its power is absolute and entire. He seems to have as much imagination, in point of *quantity*—if the word may be used—as is usually allotted to a great poet; but he has chosen to condense it into a smaller compass than great poets have usually done; so that perhaps it has a more intense power, within its own sphere, than was ever possessed by any human being. But it must be confessed that, like the sun's rays collected by a magnifying lens, while his imagination illuminates, it is too apt to scorch and consume all that comes within the range of its influence.

Something like the foregoing may also be said of all Lord Byron's other poetical qualities and attributes—of his fancy, his sensibility, his knowledge both of human nature and of books, his taste, his judgment, and even his desire after fame and popularity. He possesses all these in an eminent degree; but they have all received a colour and a bias from his personal character, and the habits of his early life before he became a poet. I mean that they have received this colour and bias in a degree that may be traced—or rather that cannot be concealed—through all their forms and operations. If this were not the case, it would be unnecessary, and perhaps unfair, to notice it at all:

for it is evident that this must be true, to a certain extent, of the mental powers and qualities of all of us; and particularly of poets. But in no other poet are these effects apparent in any thing like the same degree. In others they may be discovered; but in him they obtrude themselves, and cannot be overlooked.

Lord Byron's fancy is as active as that of other poets; but if it sometimes ranges among flowers,—like the bee collecting sweets from them, or, like the butterfly, flutters its harlequin-coloured wings in the sunshine,—its most cherished employment is, like the serpent, to convert the sweets of those very same flowers, and the vital warmth of that same sunshine, into deadly poison, and to vent it upon the bosom that gives it shelter.—His sensibility has the same fatal facility in converting goodness and beauty into their opposites; or rather, in choosing to recognise and to appropriate only those opposites. In its wanderings through nature, if it cannot close its perceptions to the qualities of the rose and the violet, it passes them over, and settles upon the deadly nightshade. In its communion with humanity, if it sometimes suffers itself to be led *astray* into the bright regions of joy, its home is elsewhere. Its common breath is "a sigh which it would (*not*) stifle," its nourishment is tears, its music groans and imprecations, the temple of its worship a dungeon, and its chosen dwelling-place a broken heart.—And so it is with all the other poetical qualities of this extraordinary man. His whole genius, mighty as it is, seems to have been totally perverted by the unhappy circumstances of his past life. From the brightness of her visage, the majesty of her port, the wings upon her shoulders, and the super-human power of her voice, we are at once convinced that his muse is an angel; yet still there is something pervading the whole of these attributes, which tells us with equal certainty that they belong to a *fallen* angel. But if it is impossible to contemplate her splendours without feeling that they are not such as they might have been; it is equally difficult to avoid hoping and anticipating what they may yet become.

V. S.

LETTER XLIV.

THERE are, I think, four English poets who possess nearly equal claims to stand next in rank to Wordsworth and Byron. These are Southey, Moore, Campbell, and Scott. I shall speak of Southey first; without very well knowing why, unless it be that there is something about his poetry which impresses one with a high degree of respect and admiration for the personal character of the writer. And perhaps his very extraordinary powers and acquirements, (in addition to his poetical genius) and the admirable uses to which he applies them, entitle him to this distinction.

I think that Southey possesses more invention than any other of his cotemporaries; and at the same time more comprehensiveness of genius to keep this faculty in order, and turn it to account. This has been shown in the production of five long narrative poems; in two of which the stories are purely original, together with all the characters, incidents, &c. The others are on historical subjects; but history has been taken merely as a foundation,—the superstructure of characters and events, and the conduct of the story throughout, being entirely the poet's own. Indeed, the subjects which he has (no doubt purposely) chosen, are those on which we have little more than a few traditional, and in some instances contradictory notices, not worthy the name of authentic history.

There is another most important faculty, which Southey possesses in a higher degree than any other living poet; that faculty which I have said Lord Byron is completely without; viz. of so entirely adapting himself to his subject—so totally merging all his own ordinary and conventional feelings and habits in the theme about which he is employed—as never even to let them be detected, much less obtrude themselves. It is as if we were thinking, or dreaming, or seeing all that he places before us—as if the story were *relating itself*, not as if *he* were telling it. No doubt this natural faculty has been greatly improved, and brought to its present state of perfection, by the extraordinary universality of Southey's acquirements. The scenes of each of his five poems are laid in different and distant parts of the world; and yet the costume of every one—the local habits and customs—the turn of character—and the tone of feeling altogether—are understood to be preserved with the most perfect truth and consistency throughout; and yet without any apparent effort to preserve it, or any constraint on the part of the poet.

In fact, in "Joan of Arc," Southey is the national poet of France, singing the triumph of justice and patriotism, in the disgrace and defeat of England. In "Thalaba" he is the Arabian story-teller, wandering among the wild tribes of the desert, and repeating his still wilder tale of enchantment. In "Kehama" he is the native Hindu, bred up in the belief of the monstrous mythology of his country, and imbued and saturated with its oriental spirit; pouring forth its (to him) grand and gorgeous fictions, with the pomp, and power, and freedom, of the sacred river on whose banks he seems to have passed his life. In "Madoc," again, he is the stern and reverend bard of ancient Britain, singing the glories or weeping over the woes of his beloved country; or blending the sounds of his deep-toned harp with the shouts of his romantic countrymen, when they have planted the cross of Christianity on the shores of the New World. And, lastly, in "Roderick" he is the poet of modern Spain, chanting forth her lofty and impassioned song of triumph over the ancient invaders of her soil, and the polluters of her native blood and lineage, trampled beneath the feet of her true sons. He is alternately each of these; and yet, throughout them all, he is the inspired poet of nature, always doing *her* bidding, speaking her language, and interpreting her will.

Southey has great power and splendour of imagination, and a high degree of fine healthful sensibility. These, added to an almost ideal purity of thought and sentiment, are noble qualifications for a poet of the first order; and they well enable Southey to do without the lighter and more ornamental parts of his art; in which he is, perhaps, in some degree deficient. He is not without fancy, of a certain kind. But there is a heavy and languid air about it. It has richness; but it wants quickness, brilliance, and vividness; it does not seem to do its errands as if it delighted in them. It does not go about them cheerfully, with sparkling eyes, mercurial feet, and a tripping tongue; but sluggishly, and as if they were tasks.

I think, too, that Southey's poetical taste wants refinement. He certainly has not that exquisite *tact* which some of his cotemporaries have. I should think that he frequently rejects a better thought than he retains; and he still oftener retains more than he need. In fact, amplification, without an adequate degree of richness to make it acceptable, is the fault of his poetry. But perhaps it is too much in the spirit of mere criticism, to speak of this as a fault; for it certainly springs from the very same cause to which he owes many of his best qualities;—namely, those extensive and ever-extending acquirements of which I have before spoken. Supposing this to be true, it is mere cant to call his amplification a fault; because it is the natural accompaniment of his beauties.

I think there is much less of what is called originality about Southey's poetry, than there is about that of some other living writers who have much less genius. There are more of the common-places of poetry in it, because there are more of the artifices of style and of authorship. This probably results from that eminent good sense which is a striking feature of Southey's mind. He has too much clear-sightedness not to perceive the great advantages that are to be gained by cultivating poetry *as an art:* And he knows that this may be done without degrading it; because none but a poet by nature can cultivate it at all—at least to any practical effect. Southey might easily have given much more *appearance* of originality to his works; but it must have been done at the certain expence of making them much less useful and valuable. It may sound odd to talk of poetry being *useful;* but I employ the word in its loftiest, not its low and popular sense. It is nothing less than a profanation of the term poetry, to apply it to that which affords mere gratification, of whatever kind, or in whatever degree. That which does not strengthen, or purify, or exalt the human mind, is not poetry. It may, or indeed it must, do this in conjunction with present and immediate pleasure. In fact, the *utile* and the *dulce*, in their highest and most comprehensive senses, are the essential attributes of poetry; and it can no more exist without one of these, than it can without the other. You know I am as ready as most people to admit the value of mere amusement. There are few things better, but there *are* a few.

To return to Southey. He might easily have directed the stream of his genius into a different and a more striking course. He might have trained it to play up in fantastic fountains, or led it over artificial rocks and precipices, in the form of cascades and water-falls; and the multitude would have gazed at it with open-mouthed wonder. But if he had done so, it must have ceased to be what it now is,—a full, fair, and majestic river, flowing calmly along its channel in purity and brightness; and while glorying in its conscious power of conveying health and fertility to the countries through which it passes, yet delighting to impart life and beauty to the lowest insect that drinks of its waters, or the meanest flower that grows on its banks.

It is a very remarkable circumstance, that the passion of love, which is the acting and presiding spirit in the greater part of modern poetry, is almost wholly excluded from Southey's works. Or at least it is only glanced at incidentally, as forming an occasional cloud, or a gleam of sunshine, in the pictures of human life which he places before us. This is probably another result of that strong good-sense, that perfect clearness of mental perception, of which I have before spoken. Southey sees every thing in nature in its true light, and gives to every thing its real power and preponderance, and no more. Love is a delightful dream for the romantic imagination of a poet to yield itself up to, as a resource and refuge from the realities that are for ever dragging it to the earth. But, in point of fact, it exercises, comparatively, very little influence in the universe of the human mind: and it is *this* that Southey studies, as a philosopher as well as a poet; it is this that he would trace and exemplify, in its grandest and most universal bearings and attitudes; and he would do so for the benefit as well as the delight of mankind. Accordingly, in the whole of his works, he allows to love all the influence that it actually possesses and exhibits; but no more. He delights to pourtray the domestic affections, in all their power, and purity, and beauty; and in no other department of his art is he at once so poetical and so natural. Love, therefore, as it does in human life, is allowed to illustrate and beautify the other passions, but not to absorb and annihilate them. In "Joan of Arc" there is the remembrance of a subdued affection, for ever shedding its moonlight radiance over the thorny path of a sublime piety and a lofty patriotism.—In "Thalaba" there is the natural yearning of youthful blood towards the playmate of his childhood, and the companion of his youth. But this is merged, and almost lost, in the unfading memory of injuries, and the unceasing thirst for revenge. And if his love returns at last, it is but to cast a halo of holy light round his dying head, and form the brightest hope that awaits him, in that paradise to which he looks forward as the reward of duties painfully, but nobly fulfilled. In "Kailyal," too, one of the purest, loveliest, and most affecting creations of poetry,—while there is an unceasing and almost unconscious *tending* of earthly affection towards the beautiful Glendoveer, it never for a single moment intrudes, to disturb and interfere with the deep self-devotion of filial duty and love.

This pervading spirit of good sense, which is for ever at work in Southey's mind, is, perhaps, one of the noblest, and certainly one of the rarest attributes of genius; and without it genius can never be eminently useful, and may be, and frequently is, eminently mischievous. Without this, it blindly pursues the revelations that are made to it of what we *may be*, and forgets, or neglects to observe, what we *are*. Without this, it contemns or disregards the goodness and the beauty that lie scattered about its feet; and indulges in vain yearnings after the shadows and reflections of that which is beyond its reach. Without this, while it gazes upward on the stars of heaven, it is but too apt to stumble over the little inequalities and obstructions which common people see and avoid. Thinking of this beautiful quality in Southey's mind, coupled with his indefatigable industry, and his universal acquirements, I cannot help anticipating, that, if he should enjoy the natural term of man's life, and go on to the end as he has up to the present period, he will one day arrive at the high distinction of having done more to benefit his fellow-beings—to make them wiser, better, and happier—than any of his cotemporaries; or, perhaps, than any other writer, living or dead, except Shakespeare.

V. S.

LETTER XLV.

Of all the writers in verse whose works I have ever read, either ancient or modern, Thomas Moore goes nearest to realize what seems to have been, in all ages and countries, (except perhaps the present age in Europe) the *popular* notion of a poet: that is to say, a person gifted by nature with the power of moving at will (and as it were by enchantment) the passions and affections of the human heart, through the medium of certain metrical compositions or effusions, which seem to have some necessary connection with music and musical instruments. This, from the fabled ages of Orpheus and Linus in Greece, down to that of the Troubadours of Italy and France, the Romancers of Spain, and the Bards and Minstrels of the north of Europe, seems to have been the general notion of a poet; and this notion the author of Lalla Rookh realizes more fully and distinctly than any other living or dead writer; adding to it the extensive learning, the elegant accomplishments, and the finished taste of more refined, but not more poetical times.

To read and enter into the spirit of this writer's works, is to be living in a world "not made with hands, immortal, above the heavens." To the young, it is to feel that they will for ever remain young; and to those who have ceased to be so, it is to become so again. It is to drink the wine of human existence without the lees; to inhale the perpetual breath of spring and summer in our native place; to wander hither and thither on the banks of the sweet stream of life, as it goes leaping, and singing, and sparkling along among the pleasant hills, before it has yet reached the flat plain through which it is to sleep and stagnate along the rest of its dull, dreary course; it is to be carried back, as in a dream, "to that imperial palace whence we came," and whence we have wandered like children from their home.

You are to understand that I allude to the *spirit* of Moore's writings, not to the substance and detail of them: for two out of the four tales of which his work consists are in a high degree mournful and tragic in their subjects and incidents; and nearly all his most exquisite songs (and he is the only song-writer of the age) are adapted to sighing rather than smiling melodies. But the spirit and effect even of these is perfectly consonant with what I have said above. Thus, the Romeo and Juliet of Shakespeare, more than any other of his works, breathes the very breath and spirit of youth ; and yet it is more mournful than any other of them. But its sadness, like that of Moore's works, is the very music of passion. Its murmurs are those of the stockdove to its mate; its melancholy is that of the moonlight beautifying the green hills at night; its sighs are those of the summer breeze perfumed by moving among flowers; its tears are the rain-drops which refresh and fructify the parched soil on which they fall.

Moore possesses all the natural and acquired qualities of a poet in an eminent degree, without possessing any one of them in a *super*-eminent degree. His imagination, fancy, and sensibility, his learning, judgment and taste, all bear a due relation and proportion to each other, and all act in concert together in a very remarkable manner. If, however, he can be said to be deficient in any one poetical quality, it is in the higher kind of imagination; and if he over-bounds in any it is in fancy; but his fancy is almost always subservient to his taste, and his imagination seldom or never refuses to answer the calls made on it by his sensibility. Upon the whole, in this due balancing of all his poetical faculties and acquirements with respect to each other, he is surpassed by no modern poet; and by very few ancient ones.

The principal, and, indeed, the only long work by which this writer has distinguished himself, and from the perusal of which I have chiefly acquired my notion of his pretensions as a poet, is called Lalla Rookh. It takes the form of an oriental romance, and consists of a series of tales, supposed to be related by a poet, for the amusement of a Persian princess who is travelling to meet her betrothed, but unknown husband, in the celebrated valley of Cachmere. During the progress of the journey, the princess and the poet conceive a passion for each other, which threatens ill to all parties, considering the peculiar situation of Lalla Rookh as the betrothed bride of another; but at the end of the journey all turns out happily, by the poet and the bridegroom proving to be one and the same person, —the young and accomplished King of Bucharia. Nothing can be better adapted than this plan to exhibit in all their variety and splendour the poetical qualities I have described as belonging to this writer; and nothing was ever more successfully accomplished than the filling up of the outline which the poet had marked out for himself at the commencement. At the first page of his work he takes up the peculiar character and attributes of an *oriental* bard; and he never for a moment forgets or abandons them during its whole progress. The whole of his work is oriental. His stories and characters are of course taken from oriental histories and fictions. His similies and illustrations are those which would naturally and necessarily occur to a poet intimately acquainted with oriental scenery, manners, history, and habits of feeling; and which could occur to no other: and, as far as I am able to observe, they are never, without a single exception, blended with other similies and illustrations acquired from other habits and studies. And, above all, the pervading *spirit* of the whole is oriental. Its style is clear, brilliant, and glowing, like an oriental atmosphere; its diction is rich and voluptuous, yet simple and graceful, like the oriental costume; and its versification flows along in music, in perfume, and in light, like the flower-girted streams of its own valley of Cachmere.

Added to these qualities, there is a general profuseness and luxury of ornament throughout the poetry of Moore—an exuberance of fanciful illustration, and an endless variety of brilliant imagery and allusion—which are the peculiar characteristics of this writer; and which are, by many critics here, considered as the defects of his style, on account of the extravagant extent to which he is said to carry the use of them. But to me this seems like finding fault with the sun for shining brighter in one country than another, or complaining of the flowers and fruits of the east, for being more gorgeous in their hues and richer in their flavour than those of the north. It is precisely in this variety, that the beauty of the world consists; as it is precisely from its (so called) defects, that Moore's poetry derives its peculiar value, as it regards its comparative estimate among the general mass of the poetry of the nation to which it belongs. Other poets of England surpass Moore in all his other poetical qualities; but this is peculiarly his own, and therefore the sole ground of his peculiar claim to the admiration of his countrymen: for no poet is worthy to be ranked among the foremost spirits of his country, who does not differ from, and surpass all other poets, in some one particular quality. In clear and interesting narrative, Moore is very far behind Walter Scott; in pompous, sustained, and consistent description, he is greatly surpassed by Southey; in profound and original reflection, he is very inferior to Wordsworth; and in deep and heart-rending passion, he is not to be compared with Byron;—but in copiousness, elegance, luxury, and, at the same time, simplicity of language; in a brilliant profusion of fanciful and felicitous illustration; and, I will add, in ease, grace, sweetness, variety, and above all, happy *adaptation* of versification, he is unequalled by any poet of his age. It is true that his ornaments are sometimes over-profuse, and therefore cloying, and that they are sometimes misplaced, and hide the beauty they are intended to heighten; and his illustrations and allusions are occasionally impertinent to the place and matter, and interfere with feelings which ought to be predominant at the time. But saying this is little else than accusing the sun of fatiguing and dazzling our eye-sight. In fact, where these instances do occur, if they are not the effect of pure carelessness and haste, they are the necessary concomitants, (or if it must be so, the defects) of the peculiar style in question.

I should be leaving you with a very imperfect idea of this most enchanting of poets, if I were to close my account of him without telling you that, with all his love for luxurious adornment, he can sometimes lay it all aside, and be as simple and chaste as the purest touches of pathos, and the most tender breathings of sentiment require; and that, with all his voluptuousness of temperament, and his tendencies to look at human life as if it were a romance of passion and poetry, there is still to be discovered, throughout his writings, a vigorous and healthful perception of truth and beauty, and their opposites, as they really exist in nature. From all which it is evident that he sees things through a heightening and embellishing medium, only because he desires and chooses so to see them. Probably it arises from these two opposite dispositions so happily blended together, that in this poet there is none of that dreamy and diseased melancholy which infects the writings of some of his most popular contemporaries, and which in a great degree counteracts the purifying and ennobling effects which might otherwise result from their perusal and study.

I must not take leave of this elegant and accomplished writer, without mentioning to you the vast fund of delightful songs with which he has enriched the English language; and particularly those by which he has illustrated the wild and pathetic music of his native country—Ireland.

As a writer of gay, graceful, elegant, tender, and pathetic songs, Moore has no competitor at all in England—where, indeed, the art is little understood except by himself; and even in France (where it is much better understood and practised generally) he has certainly no rival, when we take into consideration the immense quantity, as well as the variety, of his productions in this class. It must be recollected, too, that Moore's best songs have been written expressly *for* the music to which they are attached—not the music composed for the songs. But the writing them in this way, if it was likely to detract from what they might otherwise have been, as poetical compositions, and specimens of finished versification, has certainly been an advantage to them as far as regards their appropriate style and expression—their *moral* adaptation to the music which accompanies them.

The work to which I now allude more particularly, is called "Irish Melodies;" and it is perhaps the most elegant, interesting, and characteristic production of the kind, that belongs to any age or country. It appears that in Ireland, (and I believe it is the same in Scotland,) there has existed, for time immemorial, a number of musical airs, which seem to have floated in the imaginations and memory of the people, from generation to generation, without having ever taken a tangible shape, or been allied to any particular form of words, or character of sentiment. It is as if the very atmosphere of this singular country had been, like Shakespeare's Enchanted Island—

"Filled with noises,
Sounds, and sweet airs, that give delight and hurt not."

These wandering airs, or "Melodies," as he has called them, have been collected by Moore; and he has endowed each of them with appropriate words and sentiments, and published them from time to time in separate sets. He has been assisted in this by Sir John Stevenson, one of the most tasteful composers of the day; who has arranged the detail of each air, and supplied it with a corresponding harmony.

In this manner has been produced what may be regarded as one of the most delightful and poetical works of modern times—a work, too, that will probably carry the poet's name to posterity, with more appropriate honors than any other he has given to the world.

I. have not made myself acquainted with the early writings of this poet, and I am not much disposed to do so: for M—— tells me that, without any of the vigorous thinking, the ennobling sentiment, and the deep passion, displayed in Lalla Rookh, they have, blended with the same brilliance of fancy and richness of illustration, an effeminate voluptuousness of style and subject, which render them altogether mischievous in their tendency, because peculiarly attractive to those, and to those only, who are susceptible of being injured by them. But it cannot be denied that Moore has now, in this his first and only work which deserves the name of poetry, nobly redeemed and vindicated the character of his muse. It is therefore fair to conclude, that whatever was exceptionable in the productions of his youth, was to be attributed to his youth alone.

V. S.

LETTER XLVI.

If a writer is entitled to take his relative station according to the quality of his genius, and without immediate reference to the comparative value of his works, undoubtedly the name of Campbell must be placed in the very highest rank among living English poets. But to award reputation to mere power, without regard to its effect, would I fear be a dangerous, if not an unfair rule to adopt, in the critical estimate of literary, or any other claims. Those virtues which no one feels the benefit of, no one has a right to be called upon to acknowledge or reward. In fact, qualities which are not used, be they good or bad, are names merely, not things; and none but the possessor has any concern in them. Treating Campbell's claims to the character of a poet on these principles, he cannot be said to rank so high as some of those of whom I have spoken in my preceding letters;

for the only regular work of his mature age and judgment is a short narrative poem called " Gertrude of Wyoming:" his youthful work, the " Pleasures of Hope," deserving to be considered only as a splendid promise of future excellence. This latter poem is, in many parts, pleasing in a high degree; and as the work of a youth of twenty, is an extraordinary example of graceful and elegant versification, and an early and rich developement of a poetical temperament and imagination. But it is without any peculiar or characteristic qualities of its own, and may be regarded more as a *poetical exercise* than as a poem, properly so called—being merely a collection of poetical thoughts, images, and illustrations, on the subject of hope, and the pleasures arising from the indulgence of that passion.

The " Gertrude of Wyoming" in no respect resembles this youthful production of its author, either in its faults or beauties. It seems to me that, if Campbell had chosen to write this poem in any other than the Spenserean Stanza—(which is without comparison the most replete with difficulties of any measure in any language,) the " Gertrude of Wyoming" would have been the most lovely, elegant, and pathetic narrative poem of the present day. But he has chosen purposely to throw difficulties in his path, for the honor of overcoming them, and *they* have in part conquered *him*. For a *narrative* poem, in particular, the Spenserean stanza is the worst that can be conceived, in every possible respect. Each stanza is almost as difficult to construct as a sonnet on the legitimate Italian model; and the Alexandrine at the end of it has the effect of completely closing up the sense in the nine lines, and thus stopping the progress of the narrative, and of course of the reader's sympathies with it, whether the sense requires this pause or not. It seems to me that Campbell's genius has felt the trammels of this measure at every page, and has fully confessed its sense of them by the frequent recurrence of tortuous and involved construction, unpleasant and unnatural inversions of phrase, occasional obscurity of meaning, and, in a few instances, the mere common-places of poetical diction. It is probable that some of these defects strike me more forcibly than they do a native; but this cannot be wholly attributed to my want of familiarity with the English language, because I find M—— agrees with me in opinion, as to almost all the examples of this kind that I have pointed out to him. Indeed he told me that I should find the language of this poem in parts more difficult to understand than that of any other of the present day, and was fearful that I should not appreciate or feel its beauties on this account. But I am not a little pleased at being able to tell you that he is mistaken in this instance. I *see* the occasional difficulties of this writer's style; but I see *through* them; and this has given me increased confidence in my progress in, and knowledge of, the English tongue; which I think that I now understand, as far as reading goes, nearly as well as I do my own.

Together with these faults,—arising, as it seems to me, entirely from the measure in which the poem is written—"Gertrude of Wyoming" possesses the most pure and unaffected beauties, of various kinds,—consisting of fresh and breathing descriptions of external nature, elegant and original fancies and illustrations, gentle and genuine pathos, and exquisite touches of general nature and individual character. And over the whole, the poet has contrived to breathe a melancholy sweetness, and to shed a mild, equable, moonlight radiance, which give it an inexpressible charm; and which are, in fact, the distinguishing characteristics of the work.

But to me it is quite unquestionable, that the real height of Campbell's genius is to be measured by his shorter pieces. The best of these are true and legitimate effusions of an inspired spirit, and evince the possession of a kind and degree of power that is scarcely to be discovered in the lovely poem of which I have just spoken. In them his genius escapes from the trammels of an over-difficult versification, and, perhaps, an over-refined and fastidious taste, and asserts its natural claims; and in so doing, it exhibits a vigour and rapidity of wing, and reaches to heights and penetrates recesses, that it has not done in his two longer pieces. "Lochiel,"—which is a colloquy between a prophetic seer of Scotland and a distinguished chieftain of that country, in which the latter is warned to shun an approaching battle,—though consisting but of eighty lines, is a noble piece of inspiration. For pompous rapidity of imagery and language, and proud vigour and vividness of imagination, it is unrivalled by any poem of the kind I have ever perused. "Hohen Linden" is in the same style, and almost equally fine. There is something peculiarly striking and appropriate in the measure in which this poem is written. It seems to ring in the ears, like the measured tramping of armed men marching to battle.

"O'Connor's Child, or the Flower of Love Lies Bleeding," is in a totally different style from these, and from all other poems. It is the gentlest of poetical creations. It is a piece which cannot properly be compared with any other that I am acquainted with, but is a class by itself,—combining the tenderness of the old Scottish ballads, the simplicity of the English, and the wildness of those belonging to that interesting country (Ireland) in which the scene of it is laid. There is, besides these, an airy delicacy about the language of this exquisite poem, and a fairy-like melody in the music of its versification, which make it altogether indescribably touching and delightful.

Upon the whole, I am satisfied that, notwithstanding the exquisite beauties to be found in the "Gertrude of Wyoming," the reputation of this poet would have stood on higher ground than it now does, and been more universally acknowledged than it now is, if he had written nothing but his smaller pieces. But his larger poems are looked to as the criterion of his claims on public attention, and he enjoys quite as much reputation as they entitle him to: while these unrivalled gems, some of which are unique in their kind, are, as far as regards the mere *public*, disregarded, or passed over slightingly. To speak an ungracious truth, the said public, whether here or with ourselves, is the worst possible judge of poetical merit. That which it likes best may, without further investigation, be pretty safely pronounced to be of the most questionable value. In England, at all events, the first of living poets is, without exception, the least popular of all the public writers who make any pretensions whatever to poetical talent!

V. S.

LETTER XLVII.

The only other English poet who occupies a place in the very first rank, is Walter Scott. This extraordinary and fascinating writer was, until very lately, without comparison the most popular poet of the day. But it is singular enough, that, within this short time, the legitimate reputation arising to him from his avowed works as a poet, has been almost entirely eclipsed, by that which has been forced upon him, as the writer of certain prose tales which have appeared anonymously, and which he is said distinctly and unequivocally to disavow. But he is such a universal favourite with the literary world, that they are determined he shall enjoy the reputation of these unrivalled works, whether he will or no. And I dare say he bears this imputation very patiently. Indeed it is generally felt and understood here that he *is* the author of them, whatever he or any one else may say to the contrary. In fact it is inconceivable that any one but himself *can* be the author of them; for, to say nothing of their being preciselv congenial with all his known studies and acquirements, who could be found willingly to forego such a brilliant reputation as they confer, but one who, like him, had already reached the very highest point of literary fame as a poet? It is no objection to the probability of his being the author, to ask, why does he not avow them?—because he does, in point of fact, enjoy the reputation they confer, as fully as if he were to avow them: and there is a stimulus, a piquancy, added to this reputation, by the mystery and concealment that attaches to it. Let any one else publicly make out a serious and plausible claim to the title of author of these works, and we shall soon see *who* will step forward and prove them to be his. But I am, at present, to speak of Walter Scott as a poet merely.

Walter Scott is, by a proud and unquestioned distinction, the poet of the most poetical times that England, or any other country, ever knew. The very spirit of chivalry reigns and revels in his gay, graceful, romantic, and inspiring pages. His readers are rapt, as in a dream, from all the dull and debasing realities of this "ignorant present" —all the vulgar gentilities and barbarous refinements of this *enlightened* age—this "Fools' Paradise" of ladies and gentlemen—this milennium of law, liberty, and legitimate governments—this drab-coloured era of coats, waistcoats, and common-places,—and transported to a plumed and turretted period, when castles occupied the place of cotton-mills—when tilts and tournaments were held in more esteem than contested elections—when men were ranked as such on proof, not on sufferance—when might was right, openly, not covertly—when law was a tool and a scourge in the hands of power alone, not of cunning and chicanery—when cant and hypocrisy were not lords of the ascendant—and, above all, a period when ladies' eyes "held sovereign sway and mastery." In short, a period when life was a brilliant pageant, not a dull promenade.

I have said that Scott enjoyed, until lately, a greater share of popular favour than any other living poet. But he owed this more to a happy and novel choice of subject, and the skill and tact by which he made the utmost of the knowledge and materials that he brought to bear upon it, than to any rare or surpassing splendour of poetical genius. That he is a poet, there can be no question; but ease, animation, and facility, a gay and graceful freedom, and an unrivalled flow of animal spirits, are his characteristics, rather than power, elevation, or originality. The high degree of romantic interest, too, which he has contrived to throw into his stories, and the clear and vivid manner in which he has related them, contributed not a little to the extraordinary success which his works at first met with. In fact, they were read more as romances than as poems; and the number of readers they found was greater in proportion. It is probable that if they had been written in prose, with the same attention to the excitement of what is here called *interest*, they would have been still more successful: as the prose tales, to which I have alluded in the beginning of this letter, have indeed since proved; for they have been even more popular than his poetry, and have actually superseded the call for it. By the bye, perhaps there needs no surer proof that Walter Scott is the author of these tales, than the fact, that, since the appearance and popularity of *them*, he has not published a single poem, or indeed any other work; though up to the period of their appearance, he was in the habit of producing at least one long poem every year. It is now several years since these tales first began to appear, and they have regularly been produced, one every six or eight months, ever since; but if Scott has not done these, he has done nothing during all this time; though an extraordinary facility, an inexhaustible fund of resources, and a very obvious disposition to avail himself of the pecuniary advantages arising from his popular reputation, are his characteristics.

The peculiar attractions of Scott's poetry arise from the vivid and picturesque manner in which he presents to the reader whole scenes, or particular objects, and the rare skill with which he as it were compels us to take a personal interest in the events and characters which are the subjects and actors in his narratives. At the commencement of each tale, the persons who are to figure throughout it, start up before us, as objects of almost actual *sight*, and with all the claims upon our curiosity which are given to them by novelty of situation, habits, and modes of feeling; and yet they are capable of exciting all the sympathy we are susceptible of feeling towards the real beings of flesh and blood who are about us: such is the natural and skilful manner in which the poet developes the motives and passions by which they are actuated. Our earliest and most delightful associations are called upon to assist in creating an interest towards beings of our own nature, whom we feel *might* have existed; and who are placed in situations and circumstances in the highest degree strange and romantic, and yet which we know actually *did* exist in times not long past; and which times have acquired an air of remoteness and antiquity, more from their dissimilarity to our own, than from the years that have elapsed since they have changed and passed away. There is a still more intense interest given to his narratives, and we yield ourselves up to their influence with a still more full and entire satisfaction, from being assured, as we are, by persons qualified to judge on this point, that this writer's extensive knowledge on antiquarian subjects, and his admirable skill in the use and arrangement of his materials, have enabled him to place before us nothing less than real and authentic pictures and transcripts of whatever he professes to represent; so that his tales of chivalry may be read almost with the same feeling as if they had, in fact, been written during the times, and on the very occasions, of which they speak. This is undoubtedly a very great addition to their immediate attraction; and it may probably hereafter be considered as their most striking and valuable quality, and that in virtue of which they will live, and will deserve to live.

Undoubtedly, if to entertain and please by liveliness of narrative, variety of incident and description, and novelty and interest of fable; if to give animation and elasticity to the fancy, and sprightliness and vivacity to the animal spirits, by the perpetual exercise of them among an endless succession of pleasant thoughts and images; if to give a healthful stir and motion to the feelings which lie on the *surface* of the human heart, by calling on and compelling them to sympathise with, and take part in, the natural developement of character and passion; if this be to fulfil the sole or chief ends of poetry, (as some critics would persuade us) then Walter Scott is the first of poets; for no one compasses these ends so directly and so effectually as he does; and this without producing any counterbalancing mischief in the way of over-refined or morbid excitement. But these are *not* the loftiest objects to which poetry may aspire and attain. It *may* purify and elevate those spirits which the existing institutions of society have polluted and debased. It *may* close and heal those wounds which the canker of disappointment eats into the heart, when the visions of youthful hope melt away like a mist before the realities of after life. It *may* be made to beam forth a light upon all the prospect about us, which shall beautify the path we tread in, cast a glory on the distance, and even change the clouds that hang over it into images of loveliness, and the shadows that rest upon it into prophetic types of the goodness that is to come. Poetry, in its highest and noblest shape, may do all these things, and a thousand more. And, in fact, in minds which are susceptible of its power, it does them. It is, to them, the true philosopher's stone, which converts every thing it touches into gold; the only elixir vitæ, which endows the spirit of its possessor with perpetual health and youth. These qualities the poetry of Walter Scott does *not* possess; but it possesses others that are rare and valuable in the next degree. If it cannot cure the ills of humanity, it can at least lull us to sleep in the midst of them, and make us dream that we have no share in them. If it cannot dry up the springs of sorrow, it can at least brighten the streams that flow from them. If it cannot clothe the beauties of the external world in a mantle of imaginative glory, it can at least bring them before us at all times, in all their actual freshness and variety, and teach us to feel their power. If it cannot lift our mental aspirations to a level with those moral attributes of our nature from which they spring, and to which they tend, it at least encreases their desire to rise, and gives a vigour and elasticity to that power which enables them to do so.

Upon the whole, there is no English poet from whose works I think you would receive so much unmixed pleasure as from those of Walter Scott, and with which I am so anxious that you should some day or other become acquainted accordingly.

V. S.

LETTER XLVIII.

In one of my last letters, I said that a public writer can only be entitled to found his reputation on the positive value of his published works, not on the power which they may be supposed to indicate. But I believe that the extraordinary person of whom I am now to speak, must be made an exception to this rule. Perhaps Coleridge is the first genius of his day in this country; and yet, to prove that he is so, he has done—almost nothing. If the plant is to be judged by its fruit, Coleridge's genius must be considered as a kind of passion-flower, planted in a luxuriant soil, but left to wander about at its own will, without pruning, direction, or support; and consequently running wild and to waste, and producing few leaves and scarcely any blossoms. If, on the other hand, his genius is to be estimated by the innate powers with which it seems to be gifted, it may be likened to the seed of that monarch of the Indian woods, which, as far as we know, is eternal in its growth and duration,—putting forth innumerable branches, some of which point and almost reach to the skies, while others turn again to their mother earth, striking new roots and forming new families, and the whole together composing a living temple, "high-over-arched, with echoing walks between," and beneath the inspiring shade of which whole tribes, and even nations, worship and adore the Creator of all.

Coleridge is the very ideal of a man of genius: not the vulgar ideal, but the beau-ideal; for to his natural gifts are added extensive acquirements, on almost all subjects connected with abstruse as well as elegant learning; the whole tempered by a mild simplicity of heart and manners as rare as it is delightful. That such a man should be content to let the prime of his years melt themselves away in indolent ease, and idle, empty contemplation, is more to be lamented than wondered at, considering the constitution of poor human nature, and the subjection in which it is held by the existing institutions of society. Mr. Coleridge was bred up, too, in a school where contemplation is suffered, if not trained, to take the place of action; and where the chief study seems to be directed to the discovery of what *ought to be;* leaving what *may be*, and what *is*, as matters of comparative indifference: I mean a German university. Accordingly, his genius is very deeply tinged with the national colours of that country. There is a visionary wildness about it, a dreamy mysticism, which is almost peculiar to the character of modern German literati, and which is almost universal among them. All the published works of Coleridge, prose as well as poetry, partake of this character. The poetry consists of a tragedy, part of what seems to be a fairy tale, and some short pieces. The tragedy developes some profound *speculations* on human passion, and is embellished by some exquisite poetry; but it is as *undramatic* as mystical metaphysics can make it. The tale is wild, visionary, and, in its present unfinished state, quite unintelligible; but it is filled with touches of the most airy and elegant beauty, and contains one passage, on human friendship and the causes and consequences of its instability, which, though comprised in nineteen lines, is worth all the essays that were ever written on the subject.

The short pieces of this author seem to me to be as miscellaneous in point of merit as they are in subject. The "Rhyme of the Ancient Mariner," which is the most wild, abstruse, and fantastic of them, and that which is the least popular, because the least intelligible on a cursory perusal, is, in reality, a noble effusion of pure genius; perhaps the most so that the age can boast. It is full of lofty imaginations, sublime abstractions, and bold and perfectly original imagery; and these are conveyed to the reader through the medium of a simple and colloquial diction, which, while it is appropriate to the character of the person who relates the story, gives additional force and energy to the effect of it. It is the tale of an ancient mariner, who relates the penances he underwent for having committed an act of gratuitous cruelty, in shooting a harmless bird, that was found sporting among the sails of his vessel, in the midst of the Pacific ocean. It is at once the proof and the privilege of high genius to extract beauty from apparent barrenness. Out of these simple materials, Coleridge has constructed a poem deeply and fearfully impressive, and calculated to excite a profound moral feeling, which can scarcely be disregarded, and which cannot be forgotten. This is by far the finest and most powerful of Coleridge's productions.

In a very different style, but replete with the most genuine and exquisite poetical beauty, is a set of stanzas entitled "Love," describing the manner in which the poet's mistress was first induced to confess her passion for him. This little fragment, for it is no more, is as tender, delicate, and elegant as the other is bold, vigorous, and original. They form a striking contrast to each other, and can hardly be conceived to have proceeded from the same pen. Indeed it is one of the characteristics of Coleridge's poetical style, that it exhibits less of mannerism than that of any other poet of the day, without exception. I should think that a practised judgment might detect all the other distinguished poets of the day by their style alone, on whatever subject they were writing; but that Coleridge's would baffle any attempt of this kind. It is true his pieces are all so characteristic, in point of matter and style, that any one of them may easily be imitated, now they *are* written. But this does not prove mannerism. Those most inimitable of imitators, the authors of the Rejected Addresses themselves, could not take up a subject on which Coleridge had *not* written, and treat it as he would. And this is the criterion of mannerism in style.

Coleridge has written some prose works, of which little need be said, and nothing can be said that is either interesting or favourable. The one which might be expected to take the most distinct shape, is a literary life of himself, after the example, but not much after the manner, of Goëthe's. But, as far as it has hitherto proceeded, it might as well be called any thing else as a life of the writer, for it is nothing more than a crude, rambling, and incoherent attempt towards the developement of certain imaginations, fancies, and opinions, which seem scarcely formed, and, from their abstruse and recondite nature, scarcely worth forming.

After this account of Coleridge's published works, you will, perhaps, think that I am hardly entitled to speak as I have done at the beginning of this letter, of the extent and power of his genius. But *I have heard him talk!*—and, when this has happened to any one, it seems to be an understood thing here that, from that time forth, he may be as enthusiastic as he pleases in his admiration of Coleridge's powers, without incurring the charge of extravagance. In truth, the first evening passed with this person, if he happens to be in a talking mood, (and when is he not?) is an era in a man's life. I had no true notion of what is called the natural *gift* of eloquence, till I had been present at this extraordinary exhibition—for it is literally such. You do not go to converse, or to hear others converse; for it is the fault of Coleridge that, where he is, there can be no conversation. You go to hear *him* talk, and you expect and desire to hear nothing else. Between his prose writing and his talking there is no sort of comparison. If what he says in the course of one evening could be written down, it would probably be worth all the prose that he has ever published, in whatever light it were regarded; whether as to depth of thought, splendour of imagery, felicity of illustration, extent and variety of learning, or richness, purity, and elegance of diction. His talking is as extraordinary as the chess-playing of the mechanical figure that was exhibited some years ago in Paris. You sit, and witness it in silent admiration, and wonder how it can be. And, like that, there's no puzzling or putting him out. He seems wound up, and *must* go on to the end. But when that end will arrive no one can guess; so that the spectators are frequently obliged to get up and go away in the middle of the game—not being able to anticipate any finish to it. Like that celebrated figure, too, he always comes off triumphant. I never heard of any one having a chance with him. In fact, if there were not an evident appearance of his *feeling* all that he says, at the time he says it, he could be considered in no other light than as a wonderful talking machine, that talks on and on, because it can't help it.

But perhaps Coleridge's eloquence might, with more truth, be compared to Catalani's singing. It is as rich, as brilliant, as dazzling, and as inexhaustible as that; and can as little be followed by the orchestra who are to accompany and fill up the pauses of it, or the audience who are listening to it.

It may be full of inaccuracies and solecisms for what any one knows; and there are not wanting many to assert that this is the case in both instances; but in neither can any one detect and point them out. Perhaps the magical charm of both consists in the appearance of animated and fervent sincerity, which accompanies the *sentiment* of what they are delivering; which is not a little aided by the angelic, but somewhat vague and unmeaning smile, which is almost always playing about the lips of both. Finally, it must be confessed that we are apt soon to get satisfied, if not satiated, with the hearing of both. They surprise and delight for a time, but are too much beyond our reach, and perhaps interfere too much with our self-love, to create a permanent sympathy. Nothing but the exquisite simplicity, and appearance of good-nature and sincerity, accompanying both, has permitted them to be tolerated so long as they have.

V. S.

LETTER XLIX.

If it is the province of poetry to snatch for awhile the flesh-imprisoned spirit away from the realities of life, and cast it into a pleasant dream-like existence, which has all the vividness of reality, and yet all the ethereal brightness, combined with the floating and shifting indistinctness of a vision of sleep—the author of "The Isle of Palms" may claim a distinguished rank among English poets; for this is what *his* work does more than any other I have ever perused. It "takes the prisoned soul, and laps it in Elysium."

The tale begins in the midst of the ocean at midnight. We are transported thither we know not how, and seem to be floating in the moon-lighted air, as if on wings; with the murmuring waters below us, and the blue sky, and the watching stars above. Suddenly a ship, or the vision of a ship, for we scarcely know which, appears at the horizon: a vision in a vision. It approaches towards us like a spirit, having all the ocean to itself. We look down into it, still seeming to float above it in the air, and see on the deck two ethereal creatures, standing side by side in the moonlight. " Their shadows never stir!" We continue to look upon them, luxuriating in the contemplation of their beauty, till our hearts become almost satiated with it; when suddenly, in the midst of this heavenly stillness, portentous cries burst from the ship. She has struck on a hidden rock, and is sinking: nothing can save her: she sinks —she and all that are in her sink before our eyes. Again we have the whole scene to ourselves—the moonlight heaven, the floating air, and the murmuring ocean—murmuring and moaning, as it were over the lost glory that itself has swallowed up. Anon, the scene of our dream-like vision changes. The two creatures whom we had seen standing together on the deck of the lost ship are saved; they alone of all her crew. They are cast together on a rock; but a boat that drifts to them from the sunken vessel, carries them to a near island of beauty and of bliss—the Isle of Palms. Here they dwell together like our first parents in Paradise; and themselves become parents to a creature as pure and beautiful as themselves.

This second portion of the dream is lovelier than the first; and it lasts for years that seem as days. At length it changes once more. We are transported to the mountains of Wales,—the birth place of these two beings; for they are mere *human* beings, and the tale is but a tale of human joy and woe. Here we find the parent of one of them, who has been pining for her lost child, till hope itself has died within her, and its phantom alone haunts her despairing thoughts. It drives her, at last, to the sea-shore. It was *there* that she parted from her beloved child, and thither she will follow the lost image of her; she will seek it on the spot where she last saw it, and will find a melancholy joy in for ever listening to the sounds that murmur round its distant grave. She arrives there. But the shouts of the people disturb the sacred silence of her grief. They are hailing with joy the return of a long-expected vessel; and what has she to do with joy! But they are speaking indistinct words, of three christian souls, who have returned to their native country, after a wondrous sojourn of many years on an unknown island in the Atlantic main, whither they had escaped from the wreck of their vessel. She hears the name of the youth to whom she had trusted her heart's treasure. It is *they* who are returned! They go back to their cottage on the Cambrian mountains—the strain closes as sweetly as it opened—and our dream ends; yet remaining still a dream after we awake from it, and so to remain for ever.

You see this story is simplicity itself. It is no more than a real tale of human smiles and tears: And yet the divine art of the poet has thrown a halo of unearthly light all about it, which gives it an air of perfect enchantment throughout. Its incidents are such as might happen without making any call upon our special wonder; and the passions and sentiments which spring out of them are perfectly natural and unexaggerated. And yet the whole has the air of a "Midsummer Night's Dream," and we can remember it in no other light.

This power, of steeping in the light of poetry every thing that it touches, is the characteristic of Wilson's genius. Almost any one thing is to him as poetical as any other; for he can make poetry out of any thing, or nothing. His rich and enthusiastic mind seems to be so thoroughly embued with the spirit of poetry, that all things which pass through it, in whatever colours they may enter, come out glowing with its rainbow hues. To him poetry is a real thing, not a vision of the brain. There is a mysterious relationship between the thoughts of his mind and all external objects, whether animate or inanimate, which changes them all into ministering spirits of ecstasy and delight. The earth on which he treads, the flowers that beautify it, the air he breathes, the very mists and vapours that rise and form themselves into clouds above his head, are all instinct with a poetical life. The sov'ran sun he bows to as a king, and worships as a god. The stars are his friends and companions; he talks to them and they answer him. And the moon—the lady-moon—she is the queen and mistress of his affections; he loves her with a *human* love; his affluent imagination clothes her in all the attributes that his heart seeks for,—and he is satisfied. This is the very faith, the religion of poetry.

But Wilson's poetry is far from being without defects. There is a diffusiveness of style about it, which greatly enfeebles the effect of particular passages, and gives to the whole an air of languor and lassitude. He is so in love with the beautiful thoughts and images that come to him, that he is not content to place them before us in the most striking point of view; but he must shew them to us under every possible form and aspect; till at last he wearies and exhausts our admiration of them. He delights to deck them, too, in a profusion of ornamental diction, which frequently impairs the effect of their natural beauty. He covers them with fold after fold of glittering attire, till the form is lost beneath the dress.

The shorter poems which accompany the "Isle of Palms," appear to me to possess most of the faultiness belonging to this author's style, with comparatively little of its beauty. There is a mild and amiable tenderness about most of them, the effect of which would be very pleasing, if it were not a good deal deteriorated by his perpetual disposition to amplify without heightening. He appears to be gifted with a rich fund of thought and reflection, and an inexhaustible flow of language; and the extreme facility of amplification which these afford him, tempt him frequently to indulge in it without judgment, and therefore without effect. Every word, thought, or image in a poem, which does not *add* to its effects, does not remain a dead letter, but positively detracts from them. And this is peculiarly true of short pieces. They must be distilled over and over again through the alembic of the writer's mind, till they become a concentrated essence. Without this they are mere impertinences. There must also be something peculiar in the nature of the subject-matter to be acted on by this process in the first instance; otherwise it will come out of the vessel in much the same state as it went in. Distilled water remains but *water* after all: it is only a little purer, and not any clearer, than that which flows directly from its native spring. Wilson's shorter pieces usually consist of the pleasing and natural reflections which arise in the writer's mind, on the contemplation of certain external objects of nature; and they are just such as would be likely to arise in any other amiable, cultivated, and reflecting mind, on the like occasions. But this is not poetry; and all the eloquence of language in which it is clothed is incapable of making it such. This leads me to conclude this letter by adding, that, if I were obliged to designate Wilson's style by any *one* epithet, I should say—it is *eloquent*. This is at once its chief characteristic, and its greatest defect; for eloquence and poetry are not only distinct from, but almost incompatible with, each other. To be eloquent is a fine thing; to be poetical is a finer; and Wilson is each occasionally, and that in a very high degeee: but he is never *both* at the same time; and probably he would attain to each more fully, if he would never attempt to be so.

V. S.

LETTER L.

CRABBE, the extraordinary writer of whom I am now going to give you some account, though possessing great talents for poetry, is of all men living the most unpoetical. He was unquestionably intended by nature for a poet,— for he has great sensibility, very fine powers of imagination, and a searching glance into the secrets of the human heart; and yet, instead of contemplating the visible and intellectual world with a poet's eye, he looks at all the real poetry that is within and about us, with an eye, and through a medium, which change it all into prose—degraded and degrading prose. He has employed all his long life in writing verse, the object and effect of which is to persuade mankind that there is no such thing as poetry in existence. And he has succeeded to admiration; so that we get up from the perusal of his works with the full conviction that our human nature is utterly base and selfish; and that, moreover, the fields are not green, the flowers do not smell sweetly, the birds do not sing cheerfully, and the sun does not shine warm and pleasant in June: and it is necessary to get abroad into the open air again, and see and feel all these things for ourselves, before we can escape from his false creed, and return to a true and wholesome belief in the beauty and goodness of the external world, and the nobility of man.

This is a very sad employment indeed for a mind like that which is bestowed on the writer of whom I am speaking. Its results, unlike those of Charity, are twice *cursed;* they curse the giver as well as the receiver. As if a dire necessity of our nature did not enough bind us to the earth we are upon, and the things that are of it, this writer would pluck every feather from the wings of the imagination and prevent us from even lifting ourselves up to look out of the window of the dungeon in which he would persuade us that we are confined. As if there were not enough disagreeable realities in the world already, he sets his imagination to work to create new ones, or to aggravate those which exist, and to persuade us that others exist where they do not. His poetry is, to say the least of it, a work of supererogation, from beginning to end. When he had found any one to *deny* that there is a sufficient quantity of vice and misery in the world, it would then have been time enough for him to come forward and make known his discoveries on the subject. When it had become a general theme of observation, that guilt and wretchedness had betaken themselves to holes and corners, and become difficult of access, it would then have been early enough for him to have hunted them out, described their forms and features, and shewed the world how it might best gain an intimacy with them. His consummate skill in delineating the objects of direct and immediate perception, is chiefly employed in shewing us what it is the express business of poetry, if not to deny the existence of, at least to conceal or palliate; or if it cannot do these, teach us to overlook or forget. The whole business of his life seems to have been, to discipline his naturally fine and susceptible powers to do precisely what, as a poet, he was bound to leave undone. His avowed system, and that by which he seeks to distinguish himself from all other poets, is one which is naturally and essentially opposed to all real poetry. He sets out with declaring his determination to paint manners, characters, and things—

"As *truth* will paint them, and as *bards* will not."

In other words, he seeks to prove himself a poet by shewing that poetry is a cheat. His naturally searching intellect has enabled him to see that poetry cannot exist as opposed to, or in the absence of, natural truth; and he therefore concludes that the greater the truth the greater the poet. He seems to think that because poetry is bound to "speak the truth," she is equally bound to speak "the whole truth, and nothing but the truth." This is his grand mistake; and it is the most extraordinary and the most fatal one that was ever made by a man gifted with such unquestioned talents for poetry as Mr. Crabbe is; and who appears to possess such amiable dispositions, and so excellent a heart.

These are the general observations which have suggested themselves to me, in considering Crabbe's avowed *system*, and in attending to much of the detail by which he has worked it out. But if I were to stop here I should be doing great injustice to my own feelings respecting many parts of his works, and should leave you possessed of a very imperfect notion of his real character as a practical poet. Nature, in fact, made him a poet; and all his own unconscious efforts to frustrate her will have been unavailing. Accordingly, we find interspersed through his writings, numerous passages containing the most genuine and exquisite description of natural scenery; many examples of a vigorous imagination and an active fancy, exercising themselves among the accidental and conventional forms of society, as these are found to be blended with the essential and inherent qualities of the human heart; occasional delineations of character and passion, which are in the highest degree difficult to catch and develope, on account of the complicated and subtle nature of their causes, and yet which instantly strike the mind of the reader as natural and true, on account of the clear and masterly manner in which they are illustrated and made out; and above all, many passages, and indeed whole tales, of the most tender beauty and the most touching pathos, describing the loves and joys, the sorrows and sufferings of the poor,—but describing them in such a manner as to make them, or rather to leave them as it found them, the real *poetry* of humble life. In this respect the tales of Phœbe Dawson, in the "Parish Register," and that of Thomas and Sally, in the "Borough," are unrivalled in any language. They are the perfection of simple pathos and natural truth. Indeed I question if any thing else of the kind exists in any other English author, or even in any other language.

I ought also to mention that this author's last work, which is a collection of what may be called *domestic* tales, on various subjects having no connection with each other, is free from nearly all the faults which I have described as resulting from his system; in which, in fact, his system itself is abandoned. The consequence is, that a work has been produced every way worthy of this gifted writer; combining all the excellent qualities of his other works, and disfigured by scarcely any of their besetting faults; and being altogether highly entertaining and instructive. These tales exhibit consummate skill in the delineation of character, arising from an extraordinary and apparently intuitive faculty of looking into its secret springs in the human heart, and tracing the mysterious manner in which they blend with the motives and causes which reach them from without. This, being always kept in subservience to views, remarkably sober, healthful, and judicious, and *therefore* in the highest degree kindly and liberal in regard to nature and society, and the effects of their reciprocal action on each other, has produced a series of narratives in many instances deeply impressive, and calculated to produce the most powerful effects in the way of warning or instruction; and in every instance highly amusing and attractive, from their great variety, and their perfect keeping and truth.

If, as a foreigner, I am entitled to speak of the versification of this writer, I should say that its faults (and it is nothing *but* faults) like all the other faults of this author, arise from system. It is the most artlessly artificial of any I ever read, not excepting our own. Indeed it is altogether French, though French at third-hand. It is modelled on that of Pope, which was modelled on that of Boileau and the French dramatists. One half of the line usually *balances* the other; and the sense almost always ends with the couplet. This plan is followed, too, unlike that of the French and their best imitators, without any pretence whatever to either tact or ear; so that the most barbarous and frequently the most ludicrous effects are produced. This, together with a constant and most injudicious use of alliteration, and a collocation of words or syllables according to their similar sounds, distinguishes the versification of this writer as the very *ideal* of what versification should *not* be. And yet, with all his faults, it is impossible to rise from an impartial perusal of Crabbe's works without sentiments of admiration towards his genius, and of respectful affection for his character.

V S.

LETTER LI.

Leigh Hunt is at present much better known as a journalist and prose-writer, than as a poet; but if he should be remembered hereafter—and I think he well deserves remembrance—it will be chiefly for his poetry. This, at times, most pleasing writer, seems to me to possess, in a greater degree than any of his cotemporaries, the talent of detecting and making known the poetry that exists in actual life and nature—that is perpetually springing up in the minds and hearts of every one of us; and that would, if we would let it, clear and beautify the common path we all of us must tread, and which most of us do what we can to strew with thorns, briars, and stumbling-blocks. That this poetry does so exist, and that we do thus weakly and wilfully overlook or neglect it, are facts, of the truth and importance of which this writer seems deeply impressed; and he loses no occasion of proving and impressing them on others in a very characteristic manner, and, I should think, to very excellent effect, both in his prose and verse. Probably, taking his writings altogether, there is no other living English author who has disseminated among his readers so great a portion of kindly and considerate regard towards others, and of satisfied and happy thoughts and habits of feeling as it respects themselves, as Leigh Hunt has. And, perhaps, he takes, with some few exceptions, a more just and healthful general view of what human nature is, and of what the state of society springing out of it might and ought to be, than any other English writer of the day, with the single exception of Wordsworth. Not that I mean, for a moment, to compare these writers together,—for no two persons can more decidedly differ from each other in every characteristic feature of their minds,—except in the sincerity of their desire to see their fellow-creatures happy, and, at the bottom, the similarity that will, I think, be found to exist in their views, as to the means of promoting that end. Perhaps, too, these poets resemble each other in one more particular; namely, in that intense and absorbing feeling of their own personal identity, which in vulgar language, and by vulgar feelings, is in all cases called *egotism;* but which, when accompanied by genius, (as it is in both these instances), never fails to produce results equally interesting and important to all who observe them with a wise and liberal eye.

Leigh Hunt deserves, by way of distinction, to be called the Poet of Real Life; for it is in depicting and illustrating what is good and beautiful in that, that his strength lies; it is there, and there only, that his kind and happy spirit luxuriates and feels itself at home. It can, in the language of a little English poem, that I read in a periodical work the other day,

"Travel on every wind that blows,
Pay evening visits to the moon,
And make the stars its play-fellows;"

but the earth is its only proper and secure resting-place, and merely *human* beings are the only ones adapted to call forth and employ its best and wisest sympathies. He himself would probably be the first to confess, that Nature has not gifted him with the power of originating grand and lofty conceptions,—as she has some of his cotemporaries; or enabled him to sport at will in a tumultuous sea of passion, as if it were his native element,—as she has others; but she has, perhaps, more than compensated him for this in other respects. If she has not lifted him to the rank of a conqueror and a king in her dominions, she has, perhaps, done better for him, by placing him among the number of her favorites and bosom-friends—by initiating him into her most hidden mysteries, and making him acquainted with her secret thoughts—by condescending to lead him by the hand through all her private haunts, and point out to him the objects of her minutest cares—by peeping with him into those secluded nooks and dim recesses which she hides from prouder eyes, and into which they would disdain to look; but where lie all the brightest gems, and all the sweetest flowers which she uses to deck her every-day robe, (which is also her most becoming one,) and where she gathers the materials for all those little home-made cates on which she delights to feed her humble-hearted worshippers. In short, she has gifted him with that better than Ithuriel's spear, whose touch shews the beauty which exists in every thing.

I would wish you to understand that, throughout this sketch of Leigh Hunt, I am speaking of him in his joint capacity of prose writer as well as poet. I find that I cannot very easily separate the two characters; and it does not seem necessary that I should; for in all his writings, whatever may be their form, there is the same obvious endeavour towards the one end of making his readers wiser and happier, by making them more conscious of the causes of their own faults and follies, and more tolerant towards those of others, and at the same time more alive to the innumerable sources of delight that exist within themselves, and every where about them, covered, but not concealed, by the thick veil of habit and custom. I am afraid it never yet could be said of any popular and professed author, as Leigh Hunt is, that the fulfilment of this desire was the *predominant* object of his writings. But I think, if ever it could be said of any one, it may of him. I am certain, however, that this is the predominant *tendency* of them, when they are read in the spirit in which they are written, and with eyes not blinded to the wisdom of simplicity, and feelings not deadened to a perception of the innate goodness of our common nature.

M—— fully agrees with me in this opinion of Hunt's works. Indeed, it is by him that I have been more particularly led to notice this quality of them. He was telling me the other day, that he began to be a reader much about the time that Hunt began to be a writer; and from the circumstance of their fathers having been known to each other, M—— was led to pay a particular attention to his progress in the early part of his career; which he was able to do with perfect impartiality, as he has never had any acquaintance with Hunt himself, or with any of his friends. He added, that, from that time to the present, he has never once lost sight of Hunt, as a political as well as a miscellaneous writer, and has never once been led to suspect the purity and sincerity of his views, even in the former of these characters; which is more than he seems ready to say of any other public man. He differs from Hunt in many respects, as to the best means of promoting the ends he has in view, and also on many other points of taste and opinion; but I find that he has more respect for him as a public writer, than he has for any other of the day, without exception. Hunt was among the first of those on whom he was induced to lean in confidence, when he began to feel and judge for himself; and all the others have, one by one, slipt from under him, and left Hunt alone. This seems to have created in him an affectionate respect for this writer, which almost takes the character of a personal friendship; and, indeed, he seems as much disposed to heighten his good qualities, and palliate his faults, as if this friendship really did subsist between them. Perhaps this quality in a writer, of exciting a feeling something like that of personal friendship towards him, in the breasts of readers who know nothing of him but through his works, is one of the most unequivocal proofs that can be adduced of the value of those works, and the sincerity of their author. Among our own writers, we have none who excite this kind of feeling in the way Montaigne does: him we love as a father, a brother, and a friend; and, accordingly, his writings are worth nearly all the others that we possess put together. I find I am talking of the writer all this time, instead of endeavouring to give you some idea of the characteristic qualities of his works: but, perhaps, one of those characteristics is, that they dispose the reader of them to do the very thing that I have now been doing. They certainly make you forget the *author*, more than any I have ever read; which is a rare and admirable quality. But, perhaps, they make you think of the *man* a little too much.

Hunt undoubtedly has genius; though it is not of an excursive or comprehensive nature. But over all subjects that come within the sphere of its operation, it has absolute controul. It pierces into their essences, with an eye made doubly keen by universal kindness and love, and is perpetually discovering in them, and bringing forth to the sight of others, what never can be found but through the *desire* of finding it, and what perhaps in some instances only exists through that; but which does not, therefore, the less really exist, for all the purposes of instruction and delight. Speaking of Hunt as a poet, there is this striking difference between him and almost all others of our own times,—that, in telling a story, his object is, not to shew his acquired skill or natural gifts, by dressing up his subject in the external garb, or embellishing it with the artificial charms of poetry; but to bring out the real poetry that is associated with it, or that forms a natural part of it. He believes that nature is more poetical in herself, than all the devices of man can make her; and is therefore content to be her interpreter, where others seek to be her teacher and guide. And perhaps it is true that more is to be learned by silently listening to her voice, and earnestly watching her slightest motions, than even by walking hand in hand with her, taking part with her in talk, and occasionally disputing a point with her; for if the latter teaches us to cavil cleverly, or dispute successfully, the former does still better for us, in making us kind, humble, tolerant, susceptible, and sincere. Neither does Hunt possess that wild, wilful, and restless kind of genius, which *compels* him to write poetry. He is a poet, not because he cannot help it, but because he wills and chooses to be so. Indeed, he often seems to become poetical from the mere intensity of his wish to be so—from the mere strength of the loving-kindness he bears to his fellow beings, which is constantly engendering a desire to please and do them good. In fact, I cannot help thinking that I see, in this earnest and sincere desire for the welfare of all living beings, the chief source of Hunt's best qualities as a public writer; for, to promote that welfare is, generally speaking, the tendency and effect of those qualities; and it is the essential nature of desire, to engender power in proportion to its strength.

Another of Hunt's characteristics is, the extreme directness and simplicity of the means he takes to arrive at his poetical ends. Indeed, there is no doubt that he carries this to a faulty extent. He sees every thing so clearly and vividly himself, that he thinks nothing more is needed, to make others see it in the same manner, than to place it before them in the same aspect in which it may happen to have presented itself to him. But he is mistaken in this opinion, or rather feeling—for such it is. If this were true, there would be no need for him to write at all. He is not a poet, unless he makes obvious to others, things which they could never have seen without his intervention; not without the intervention of a *poet*, but of *him* individually. A writer may see and point out poetry to others, without being himself a poet. Strictly speaking, a poet is such only in so far as he has *created* that which would, and in fact *could*, never have existed, but for him. This may at first seem inconsistent with what I have said above, as to Hunt's characteristic power of detecting and making known the poetry that exists in nature, and his being satisfied to serve as her interpreter; but I do not think it is so. There may be twenty different translations of a sentence; and though the actual dry *meaning* may be the same in all, the feelings and associations excited and called forth by each will be different from those of all the others. It is the same in interpreting the language of nature. Every one who is a poet will interpret her differently, not only from all other men, but from all other poets, and in so doing will create images and sensations which would not in any other case have existed. Perhaps this may be taken as one of the criterions of genius. Without this power, a man may occasionally write what will be poetry to others; but he is not a poet.

I will conclude this letter by translating for you a small portion of an article which has lately appeared in one of the periodical works, on this writer's poetry. I do this because it explains what I feel about him better than I could myself, without its assistance:—

"* Mr. Hunt's poetry is of a very peculiar character. It has no incense and dazzling lights, and no grand or deep masses of shadow, but is, like Wynant's landscapes, all over spots of sunshine; and like them, what is not sunshine is yet not shade. Or, if his poetry sometimes puts forth streaming lights, they are not splendid and continuous, but broken, and soft, and sparkling, like those made by the moon on running water when the breeze is playing with it. It keeps a perpetual smile about the lips of the reader, which is not dissipated even when it brings starts of tears into the eyes—for they are always pleasant tears. It is like the motions of that universal favourite, the robin-redbreast, which starts up before you in strange places, and looks in your face pertly, and yet pathetically. There is, running through the whole of it, a vein of frank, cordial humanity, of genial 'clear-spirited' thought, which is delightful.—It is very musical too; but its music is on a small scale;—not flowing and harmonious, but sweet and springy—dancing and liquid—like that which is made by the little clock-work organs that they put into snuff-boxes."

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* Instead of re-translating this passage, I give the original as I find it in the London Magazine for July, 1820. TR.

"In conclusion, we do not hesitate to say, that, upon the whole, Mr. Hunt is one of the most pleasing and original poets of the day; but we suppose his most enthusiastic admirers will not demand for him the title of one of the greatest. We do not think of placing him beside such men as Wordsworth or Lord Byron; but we *do* claim for his genius at least a kindred with theirs. His poetry does not bear us away with it, from the world in which we live, and 'the thing we are,' and place us among the sounds, and images, and fancies of other spheres. It cannot make us see 'Helen's beauty in a brow of Egypt;'—or snatch the 'prisoned soul' from its fleshly dungeon, 'and lap it in Elysium.' It cannot revive the visions of our fancy, or cast a halo of radiance round the forms our memory has consecrated. It cannot bring back the days of our childhood, or help us to carry forward those days into after life, by clothing the whole moral and visible world in a mantle of impossible beauty, or causing it to burst upon us *again*, in all the freshness of a new creation. It cannot restore 'the glory to the grass, the splendour to the flower.' It cannot breathe into us that lofty and ideal purity of thought and principle, which, if it makes us yearn after and adore what *may be*, is but too apt to make us despise what *is*.—It cannot do these, and a thousand other things, which the imagination of a great poet,—acting on, and acted upon by that of his readers,—can. But it performs what, in these times, is a most acceptable service: It comes to us in our homes on the face of the earth, and makes us content with them;—it meets us with a smile, and what is better, makes us meet others with a smile;—it shows us what is good and beautiful, and teaches us to love that goodness and beauty, wherever we find them. To conclude these scattered and imperfect remarks,—if Mr. Hunt has not that transcendent genius which can lift us from the realities of daily life into the 'sky of poetry,' he can, at least, make us see the reflections of that sky in the waters of our own earth, and hear the echoes of its music in the song of our own birds, and fancy we feel its airs in the breezes that come about us in our own bowers."

V. S.

LETTER LII.

PERCY SHELLEY is a poet of whom I am loth to speak at any length, or even at all, decisively; because I feel that, from the nature of the works he has hitherto published, I have not had a fair opportunity of making myself acquainted with the true extent and value of his powers. But if I were to express what I feel, rather than what I think about him, I should tell you that he possesses, without exception, the most purely *poetical* mind of any living writer: indeed, that its construction in this respect is so peculiar, as to amount almost to a diseased one. With the world in which we live, the forms and objects that are about us, and the actual thing that nature and custom together have made us, he has no real concern or sympathy whatever. To him there is no beauty, but in the ideal forms that are perpetually thronging through his imagination; there is no truth, but in the abstractions of his own mind; there is no value or virtue, but in that which is not. Poetry is with him all that might be, and that ought to be; but nothing that may be, or that ever was. It is formed of the mere images of a shadowy world, floating in the mind of the poet, and by him breathed forth in volumes of misty vapour,—like the human breath received into a dense atmosphere—which only becomes visible from the extraneous matter that is mingled with it, and which disappears in the same moment that it appears. Poetry is with him, *literally*, (not figuratively, as with Wordsworth,) "the light that never was on sea or land." And it is precisely *because* it "never was," or can be, that it is poetry. If there were to appear the remotest possibility of realizing it, that moment it would cease to be poetry—for him. Shelley's poetical enthusiasm is of a more purely ideal character than any that ever belonged to so rich and lofty a mind as that with which he is gifted: so much so, indeed, that it amounts to nothing short of fanaticism; and it threatens to annul, as fanaticism always does, (at least as it respects others,) all the real practical value of the powers and acquirements to which it is linked—frequently turning them all to a most baneful account: for they cannot lie idle, but must be working either for good or evil.

With the exception of a tragic poem just published, founded on historical facts, all this writer's works are of too purely abstracted a character, that, notwithstanding the splendid poetry interspersed throughout them, they never can become popular, because they must for ever remain unintelligible to the great majority of even poetical readers.* They seem intended to shadow forth certain portions of a peculiar system of ethical philosophy, which the writer has adopted; and to develope some of the means by which that system may be brought to bear on nature and society, and some of the ends that would result in consequence. But all this is done in so abstruse, and at the same time so desultory a manner, that, I should think, without a key furnished by the writer himself, or a running commentary on the text as it proceeds, it must be impossible for any one clearly to make out the drift of it.

Indeed, Shelley's mind is so purely and exclusively a poetical one, and it is so rich in all the collateral aids by which poetry is brought out and made tangible to others, that, as it respects his readers, the poetry of his writings is every thing, and the philosophy of them absolutely nothing; whereas he evidently places much the higher value on the philosophy, and uses the poetry only as a medium of diffusing that, or a means of making it palatable. The poetry is only the garb in which he dresses what seems to him of infinitely more importance; but I am afraid his readers are satisfied to admire the beauty of the outward covering, and never think of looking beyond it. But perhaps the fact is, that true poetry and true philosophy, however sincere a love they may bear towards each other, cannot express themselves intelligibly in one and the same language, still less through the medium of each other; and when they are seeking for admirers and followers, they do well not to go hand in hand—for we are never in a mood to love them both at the same time; and yet the presence of both will always so distract and divide our attention, that it will be not worth possessing by either. Whatever intrinsic value there may be in Mr. Shelley's doctrines,—and of this I do not pretend to judge, because I do not pretend to understand them,—he may be sure that unless he seeks for some other medium than poetry through which to develope and enforce them, he will leave all the practical good that is be done in the world to such writers as his friend Leigh Hunt; while he himself is wasting the powers of his rich and resplendent mind on what will prove only a torment to himself, and to others an empty speculation. In the meantime, he has already shewn that, however his mind may, from the peculiar nature of its construction, be unadapted to philosophising,—as a merely poetical one its powers are of the purest and loftiest kind. His imagination,—if it is at times self-willed and uncontroulable, and its creations are vague, misty, and indistinct even to itself,—is yet capable of reaching and sustaining itself at heights to which no other living poet has soared. And his power over poetical language is still more unrivalled: I have seen nothing like it in modern versification.

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* The writer had either forgotten, or not read, the Rosalind and Helen. TR.

I ought not to omit mentioning that Shelley's last work—his tragedy—exhibits powers and qualities of mind quite distinct from those which are indicated by his other works, and such as could hardly have been expected to accompany them. It is a dreadfully true story, told with dreadful force, vividness, and truth; and it seems to me to display more depth and vigor of imagination in the writer, and to engender and call into action more of this faculty in the reader, than any similar work I ever read.

There is one point, relating to this poet's personal character and opinions, that I must mention to you, because it affords a curious example of inconsistency, either in feeling or in reasoning; for it must be from one or other of these sources that he derives the different articles of his philosophical creed. He has a faith in the abstract existence of every conceivable moral beauty and virtue under heaven—for no other reason, that any one can divine, but that he can no where find any of these things in perfection in actual life; and he disbelieves and denies the existence of a supreme and controling Deity, *for the very same reason!* He has a firm faith in every good thing, except that identical one which alone requires faith!

V. S.

LETTER LIII.

The only other living English poet to whom I shall direct your particular attention, is one who has just now risen into universal notice and popularity. Fancy to yourself all the gentlest elements of our nature, spontaneously blending themselves into one gentle and harmonious union, and you may perhaps gain a general notion of the peculiar character of Barry Cornwall's genius—not its sole, but its peculiar character. His spirit is occasionally delighted and able to take a flight into the far-off regions of the stars; or to commune with the clouds, and mingle its essence with the storm; but its chosen occupation is to wander silently along in the tender moon-light, waiting for those unsought glimpses of heaven which are not unfrequently allowed to descend upon us, to cheer and brighten the common face of our earth. It is not the proud cedar, planted on the mountain top of intellect, and thence lifting its lofty branches into the sky; but the graceful willow, growing contentedly on the green bank of the stream of human-life;—which, while it dearly loves the sweet wild-flowers that spring every where about it, yet loves best of all to droop its young branches and dip its slender leaves into the ever-murmuring waters, in search of the trembling image of that heaven which it sees reflected there, and which is dearer to it than the reality above, because it seems to be nearer.

Undoubtedly, Barry Cornwall possesses what may be regarded as the only true and healthful poetical temperament; namely, that which can not only see, but feel and appreciate, in all their various qualities and degrees, the goodness and beauty that are to be met with every where around us. And if there is a subdued and smiling melancholy about his mind, which somewhat deteriorates from its strength, it adds, in at least an equal proportion, to its gracefulness and beauty. You will be quite sure that I mean any thing rather than to detract from the merits of this charming young writer, when I say that he is, *par excellence*, a lady's poet. It was a delightful idea of Montaigne's father, to cause his son, when a child, to be regularly waked from his sleep every morning, by the sound of musical instruments. A process something similar to this seems to have been employed by nature, in waking from the slumbers of its childhood the mind of this, one of her most favoured sons. And she seems to have used on this occasion, not the loud and lofty sounds that break from among the heights of passion; but that small soft music of humanity, which, by ears properly attuned to it, may for ever be heard, like the shepherd's pipe, breathing its faint low murmurs in the still valley of life. Believing, as I do, that this kind of music was breathed into *his* soul, expressly from that of nature herself, I cannot help dwelling for a moment longer on the foregoing pastoral image, and fancying this poet, with a group of lady hearers for ever *growing* around him, (like the field flowers round the piping shepherd,) listening to his song with thrills of silent rapture, and (like them) at once answering and rewarding it with sweet looks and perfumed sighs.

Does A—— smile, as much as to say that I am growing quite romantic again—that my admiration, (my *extravagant* admiration, as she will at present think it) for these English poets, seems to have renewed within me what even *she* had for some time past failed to inspire? You may tell her that she is wrong; and that she feels herself to be so, without knowing it. The romance of life, which never began for her, is over for me. But that self-controuling enthusiasm which now occasionally takes its place, is as much superior to it, both in source and in effect, as the clear, still, and fertilizing stream is to the turbid, restless, and brawling torrent. It is, in fact, the next best thing to that cerulean peace which *she* alone, of all the world, seems to possess—or to be possessed by—which ever she likes best. You may tell her, too, that she is bound to accept as the prettiest compliment I have paid her for a long while past, my thus leaving off in the midst of describing the poet who is the subject of this letter, in order to answer her scruples on the above point: and the rather, as he is the one whom *she* will like better than any other of those to whom I shall have to introduce her when I return. Perhaps, by the bye, when I have said *this*, I have summed up his characteristics in a manner that you will all of you understand, or rather feel, better than any thing else I could say about him. But I shall go on describing him, nevertheless, if it be only to please myself.

Whenever Barry Cornwall dies, they may write upon his tomb, "He too was an Arcadian:" for such he is, though he dwells in London in the nineteenth century. His imagination and fancy have all that pastoral sweetness about them, that tender repose, added to that active and healthful sensibility, which we attach to our idea of the happy dwellers in that enchanted land, where life itself was one long idyllium, set to its own music. And what makes this comparison the less inappropriate is, that all the above qualities of his mind,—his imagination, fancy, and sensibility,—are, as it were, embued and saturated with the beautiful mythological imagery peculiar to that golden age. The tales of old romance and chivalry, with all their passionate beauty, seem to be too rude and boisterous to be allowed a place in his somewhat *feminine* (but by no means *effeminate*) mind. Nothing seems to be permitted to enter, or at least to take up a permanent residence there, but the smooth and polished inventions and imaginations of this particular period of antiquity. But with these it is beautified and filled to overflowing,—like a modern gallery of Greek sculpture. All this produces a delightful effect on many parts of his poetry; giving it an imaginative richness and variety of character that can be communicated to it by no other means. Thus, has he to tell us of his heroine's or his mistress's voice, under various circumstances:—It is not only like all and every of the sweet sounds that actually come to us from external nature,—but it is sweet as we may have imagined the voice of Delphic girls, singing hymns to Dian; or low as that of Syrinx, when she fled murmuring before her sylvan pursuer, through the forests of Arcady; or sad and soft as Œnone's, when she pined away her life in love for the false Paris. Are we seated with him in imagination beside a summer stream, listening to his tender love tales:—We not only see it decked in all its *own* beauties, but, by a word, or a hint, he makes it bring back to our memory those that were haunted of old by nymphs and naiads; or those still more lovely ones that were instinct with the music of passion itself,—such as that into which the loving and beloved sea-maid, the "white Galatea," changed her Sicilian shepherd boy; or that other, into which the angry Pluto transformed the beautiful Cyane; or that lost one, which wandered beneath the earth in search of its lost love, Arethusa. In a word, all that is poetical in itself, is by this writer made more poetical, by a mysterious alliance which he either creates or discovers, between it and something else; as the rose and the lily look more lovely when bound up together than when separate, and smell more sweetly, because we look at and receive the odour of each, through an atmosphere created by the other. You are to understand that I am all along speaking of those parts of Barry Cornwall's poetry in which he differs from all his cotemporaries, and from all other poets. And it seems to me, that these *peculiar* parts of a poet's works are the only ones on which we can safely permit our selves to dwell, if we would convey any thing like a just notion of his characteristic qualities, to those who are unacquainted with them. Barry Cornwall, like most living English poets, has written much that reminds us of other poets, both living and dead; and in these parts, as is usually the case, he is inferior to the writers whom he resembles. But in a considerable part of his works, he reminds us of no one but himself; and it is from these parts alone that I pretend to draw any notion of his poetical talents and character; for (as I believe I have remarked in a former letter) a poet can only be regarded as such, in so far as he produces that which not only *has not* been, but *could* not have been produced, but by himself. This poet's graceful and elegant tenderness—his gentle and plaintive melancholy—his rich and passionate sweetness—his blending together of the sentiment we derive from moral and physical nature under the present form of society, with that which belonged to them in times past—these are all his own; and nothing can be more delightful than the united effect of them; in such poems as the "Sicilian Story," the "Death of Acis," "Lysander and Ione," the "Falcon," "Love cured by Kindness," and the "Broken Heart." And, to my taste, these qualities shine out, if briefly, yet even still more brightly, in those exquisite little gems, entitled "A Voice,"—the flow of which is more musically sweet than any of the sounds it tells of; or the "Vision,"—which is stately and poetical enough to have been dreamed by Tasso himself, in his cell at Ferara; or the "Last Song,"—which falls upon the senses like the last sigh of a love-broken heart.

The fault of Barry Cornwall is, that, like most other poets, and, indeed, distinguished writers of every description, he desires and seeks to possess other powers than his own, and to treat of subjects which nature has not qualified him to treat of. Whenever he endeavours at this, or indeed, whenever he uses *endeavours* towards any thing, the result is, generally speaking, a comparative failure: as may be seen in some parts of his last and longest work, "Marcian Colonna;" which is an attempt to lay bare the depths and dungeons of a diseased human heart, in a manner somewhat similar to that adopted by Lord Byron with such wonderful and terrific effect. This effect is produced in this latter instance, on account of the genius of the writer seeming to be, and in fact *being*, perfectly at home and at ease, in the midst of the desolation that surrounds it. It has power to command all the spirits that it can conjure up, simply because *they* have not the power to command *it*. But it is not so with the genius of Barry Cornwall. His was cast in a different mould, and created to a far different end; and it is only when he suffers it to take its own course, that it moves in the right one. It may be *forced* into such scenes as those to which I have alluded; but, when left to itself, it hastens to escape from the contamination of them, and hurries away to lose itself in that cloud of voluptuous sweetness which is perpetually hanging about it, like a dim halo round a distant star, and which only assumes a melancholy character, from its very intenseness; like the sweetness of Desdemona, which made "the sense *ache* at it." It is this delicious sweetness, which I take to be the peculiar charm of Barry Cornwall's genius; and which, if it ever assumes the character of sadness, is always beautified, either by memory of the past, or anticipation of the future—as a clouded sky is beautified by the departed, or the unrisen sun. Numerous illustrations of these remarks might be pointed out, in the poem to which I have just alluded. When this writer is describing the moody madness of his hero, the picture is in many parts exceedingly fine; but the poet's genius always appears to be at war with the element in which it is moving—like a slight vessel straining against a stormy sea. But when, every now and then, it escapes from this element, into one which is native to it—when it returns to tell us of calm joys, or of silent and gentle sorrows—

it regains its self-possession in a moment, and floats smoothly and gracefully along, like the Halcyon on its nest.

I shall not extend my remarks on this fascinating young writer any farther at present; because I could not do so to any good effect, without bringing forward examples and illustrations; which, you know, is not part of my plan. But you may tell a certain graceful and gentle lady, that if, when I return among you, I do not, by the aid of this poet's works, prove, even to her entire satisfaction, that grace and gentleness are more poetical than all other things, and that, therefore, *she* is, contrary to her present way of thinking, the most poetical of ladies, I'll be content not to see more of her good qualities than she herself does; or at least, not seem to see them—which will be nearly as difficult.

V. S.

LETTER LIV.

I DID not intend to have written you any thing more, expressly on the mere external objects of remark in this immense metropolis; but to have occupied your attention exclusively with subjects more immediately connected with its social and intellectual organization. But I find that I have materials for one more letter on this subject; and I anticipate that it will be a pretty long and not uninteresting one. I shall lay these materials before you in the course of a walk, which I shall ask you to take with me, through the principal streets of London, and its immediate neighbourhood.

We will, if you please, start from St. Paul's, westward—for eastward of this there is nothing worthy of particular notice. And perhaps it will not be amiss, if, before leaving this noble cathedral, we take a glance at its interior, and even make our way to the top of it, and look down from thence on what may be considered as the most stupendous and impressive sight that has claimed the attention of reflecting minds, since the period when the citizens of antient Rome could mount to the summit of her Pantheon, and gaze on the scene below; for since then there has been no other city covering any thing like so large a tract of ground, or capable of exerting so extensive an influence over the inhabitants of surrounding nations. When I speak of the ground covered by the city of London, I do not, of course, refer to that part of it which is technically called *the City*, but to the whole mass of buildings which may properly be said to constitute the Metropolis of England, and to draw a circle round which, would probably be to include a space of not less than twenty miles.

The interior of St. Paul's does not impress you with that stupendous feeling of grandeur and sublimity which St. Peter's is said to do. I cannot very well understand how this effect is brought about in the latter place, considering the immense variety of form, colour, &c., which goes to produce it; and I shall, in fact, not fully credit this effect till I feel it myself. It seems to me that the gorgeous character which is given to all the internal ornamental parts of St. Peter's, however the effect of it, as a whole, may surprise and fill the mind of the spectator, is more adapted to cloy and satiate, than to satisfy it. St. Paul's entirely differs from St. Peter's in this respect. The whole of its internal parts, except the choir and altar, are of one colour and one character; and there is, consequently, a unity and simplicity of effect, which is even more indispensable in works of this kind, than in any other. Even the paintings, with which the interior of the dome is enriched, are in black and white, merely—not in colours. All this, I cannot help thinking, is in very good taste; for, looking to the ultimate object of the ornamental part of all great metropolitan temples of this kind, dedicated as they are to christian worship, I am disposed to believe that, in the instance before us, whatever is lost in variety of effect by the absence of that gorgeous character which is usually given to similar buildings on the Continent, is more than gained in permanence and intensity.

The monuments to deceased public characters, of which there are several in this Cathedral, are, at best, but very mediocre specimens of the art; and some of them are totally discreditable to the national taste. One in particular, a monument to the memory of Captains Moss and Riou, would disgrace the earliest efforts of a nation just emerging from barbarism. The national vanity, too, shews itself even here, among the memorials to the dead. I think, in not less than one-third of the monuments dedicated to persons who have fallen in the service of their country, the most conspicuous object is a huge lion—the national emblem of a country in which a lion was never seen or heard of, except moping behind the grating of a wooden cage!

You can, probably, imagine the general effect of the view from the top of this building,—affording, as it does, a *coup-d'œil* of the most extensive mass of buildings in the world. There are times when this sight would have impressed, and almost overpowered me, with an awful and complicated feeling, arising from the world of human interests which lay, as it were, mapped beneath me. But today I have looked down upon the scene with as little wonder and respect, and almost as little fellow feeling, as I should on a large and populous anthill, which accident had lain open to my view. How is this? Is the mind the creator of its own sympathies; or is it created by and dependent on them? If I cannot answer my own question, I can do what is perhaps better—I can be content to have it remain unanswered.

We will now proceed in our walk down Ludgate Hill, and through Fleet Street and the Strand,—

the most busy and populous part of London, and answering to the Rue St. Honoré of Paris. The houses themselves, in these, and the other principal streets, where the retail trade of London is carried on, are greatly inferior in size, as well as in the character of their architecture, to those of Paris in the same class; but the shops, which occupy the lower parts, are more handsomely decorated, and more richly supplied: for in London there is so much competition in every thing connected with trade, that the most respectable retail dealers do not occupy, as they do in Paris, private apartments up stairs, or depend on their name and connections for support; but they all keep open shops, in the windows of which they display their richest and most tempting stores. Nothing can be more elegant and attractive in this way than some of the shops for the sale of articles of female dress. They are covered by rich carpets, and supplied with elegant seats, splendid chandeliers, &c., and are all attended by young men, whose good looks and genteel address are evidently considered as among the chief qualifications for the situation. In respectable shops of this kind you never, by any accident, see women in attendance on the customers. This is a rule without an exception.

After passing Somerset House, which I have fully described to you in a former letter, instead of continuing along the Strand, we will pass up a side street, in order to look at the fronts of the two national theatres; one of which is remarkable, as being, without exception, the most barbarous, and the other as equally, without exception, the finest and most classical piece of modern architecture, that London can shew.

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The front itself of Drury Lane theatre is of white stucco, and not remarkable for any thing but its plainness, and the absence of all pretension to architectural beauty of any kind. But the portico, which has lately been added to it, for the convenience of visitors alighting from their carriages, is, literally, nothing more than one of those rude kind of sheds or coverings, which are usually erected in farm-yards in the country, to protect the waggons, &c., from the weather; and it gives to the whole building a most tasteless and uncouth appearance.

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Close to this theatre is the other Royal national theatre, which takes its name from the extensive fruit, flower, and vegetable market to which it joins, called Covent or Convent Garden,—from its having formerly been the garden of a convent, when they were in fashion in this country. The portico to the principal front of this theatre is not only the finest piece of modern architecture in London, on the model of the antique, but in England, and perhaps in Europe. I know of none that can be considered as equal to it, unless it be the front of the Palais Bourbon; which produces an infinitely finer effect, on account of the advantages of its situation, but which is deficient in that pure and severe classical air which belongs to this building. It is constructed on the model which was scarcely ever departed from in the Greek religious temples before the conquest of Greece by Alexander; but which has been generally abandoned as an exclusive national model, since that period. The order, like that of all the celebrated religious temples built before the time I have mentioned, is the pure Doric,—the columns being no more than from five and a half to six diameters in height, rising immediately from the steps on which they are placed, but without bases of any kind, and the entablature being free from any ornament, unless the triglyphs may be regarded as such. The height of the columns, of which there are four, is about twenty-five feet; their diameter at the lower part being more than five feet. The walls which proceed laterally from this portico, and form that part of the front which is not covered by it, are perfectly plain, with the exception of a row of

Doric windows, a niche at each end containing a statue of the comic and tragic muses, and along each of the centres of the upper part an indented slab containing a piece in low relief, (similar in style to that which runs round the whole cella of the Parthenon), representing subjects illustrative of the rise and progress of tragedy and comedy in Greece. These sculptures, as well as the statues, are executed by Rossi and Flaxman; the statues in particular are done in a very masterly style, and are not unworthy the noble and truly classical piece of architecture which they adorn.

Perhaps I rank this building higher than it deserves, on account of its being the only pure specimen I have ever seen of the true Doric or Greek order; for I have always been accustomed to regard as in some degree spurious, any thing that pretends to be on the model of the antique, and yet differs from that order—which was the only one acknowledged as *national* in the age of Pericles. The antient specimens which exist of a regular order, in any degree differing from this, are of a later age: such as the remains of the Temple of Hadrian in the plain of the Ilissus, and the different specimens existing at Rome, and elsewhere. On the contrary, the Parthenon, the Temple of Theseus, the Temples at Pæstum and Agrigentum, &c. are all of this pure Doric, or Greek order; and nothing that differs from these deserves that name.

We will now return into the Strand down the same street we went up, and look at Waterloo Bridge, which crosses the Thames from this spot. This bridge has been built within these very few years, and is, without exception, the noblest work of the kind in Europe. Instead of consisting of an ascent and descent, as all the other bridges of London do, it is pefectly flat, like the bridge of Jena at Paris. This adds greatly to its convenience; but I am inclined to think that, in a bridge of the immense size and length of this, it takes very much from the beauty of its effect as an object of sight, both in approaching and passing over it, and in looking at it from the other bridges, or from the water. This bridge, including the arches which extend beyond the river at either end, is no less than a thousand paces long, and is built of that speckled glittering granite with which the foot-paths of Vienna are paved.* From the centre of it there is a finer view of that part of London which lies on the banks of the Thames than from any where else. We will therefore pause for a moment, and look round us.

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* It may be well to advise the reader that, throughout the letters, any details of this kind must not be taken as strictly accurate; for the writer does not appear to have consulted books, on any of the subjects treated of.

TR.

As we stand in the centre of this bridge, looking down the river, on the left, and immediately joining to the last pier of the bridge, rises the noble front of Somerset House. This is perhaps the finest object of the kind in London. A little farther on, looking like a green *oasis* in the midst of a dark wilderness of warehouses and wharfs, lay the pleasant gardens of the Temple; a range of buildings formerly belonging to the celebrated Knights Templars, but now inhabited almost exclusively by members of the law. Behind these gardens, and the houses which skirt them, rise numerous spires, towers, &c. of parish churches; few of which are conspicuous for any peculiar beauty, except that of St. Bride. The opposite bank of the river, still looking down it, is very bare of conspicuous buildings of any kind. There is only one, about midway between this bridge and Black-friars. This is a Shot Mill, which rises to a great height, in the form of a slim square tower, with a balcony at the top, and diminishing in diameter as it rises. This building is a patent manufactory for the small shot used for sporting purposes. The shot form themselves into perfect spheres, on the metal being allowed to drop, in a melted state, from the top of this tower, into a receiver filled with water, which is placed at the bottom; a wire sieve intervening, to divide the metal into minute quantities, of the desired weight. The proprietor of this mill is said to have made a great fortune by the discovery; which was a purely accidental one in the present case; though it must have been perfectly well known that all matter in a fluid state takes a globular form, when divided into minute portions, and moving in an unobstructed space.

Take these buildings as the conspicuous points in the view between this bridge and that of the Blackfriars, and fancy all the intermediate spaces filled up with houses, warehouses, wharfs, mills, limekilns, manufactories, and buildings of every description, and of no description at all,—those standing in the foremost ranks rising immediately out of the water, and all huddled together, seemingly *upon* each other, in a confused and confusing mass,— and you will have some notion of the curious and striking, but not very pleasing view, of this part of London. Immediately behind the bridge of the Blackfriars, which here runs across and divides the scene, rise in unrivalled grandeur and beauty, the dome and towers of St. Paul's Cathedral. This object forms the central point of the view. The intervening houses reach exactly to the height of the first order of this noble building; so that it rises above them all immediately at the commencement of the second order, and on this account derives a finish and completeness which greatly adds to its effect, as seen from this point. The river now winds round to the right, and disappears,—leaving nothing visible in the misty, or rather *smoky* distance, but the spires of the city churches, the Monument, and a few other lofty buildings, receding behind each other, and becoming less and less distinct, till they are lost in the dense yellow canopy or hood of smoke which always hangs over this city.

The view from the opposite side of the bridge, looking up the river, has nothing conspicuous, except the noble cathedral or minster belonging to the sister city, which takes its name from this building—the City of the West-minster. In other respects, this view presents the same heterogeneous mass of buildings, all devoted to purposes of commerce.

The face of the Thames itself in this part, and indeed in every other part that joins the metropolis, presents a very amusing and novel spectacle, to those who are accustomed to observe the dull monotony that usually reigns over the rivers that flow through great cities; which are seldom disturbed in their sleepy course, except by the accustomed ferry-boat creeping lazily across them, or an occasional vessel heavily floating its merchandise along their unwilling streams. Here, on the contrary, all is life, bustle, and endless variety. The face of the Thames at London is a perpetually changing scene of mingled business and pleasure. The banks of the river are lined, almost without intermission, with vessels of one kind or other, lading or unlading; shooting across, or in and out between the larger vessels, with the greatest swiftness and dexterity, are seen little narrow pointed skiffs, which are used and regulated as our fiacres are, to convey persons bound on business or pleasure, from one part of the town to another. These are generally conducted by a man with two oars; but they frequently have small sails, which give them a very graceful and pleasing appearance, as they glide between the large heavy trade-vessels that come labouring along, laden so as to sink them to the water's edge, and bowing down their masts almost horizontally, to enable them to pass under the different bridges. In other parts are seen, scudding along before the breeze, miniature sailing vessels, smartly painted and decorated, belonging to private individuals. These are built exactly on the model of large vessels, with sails and rigging of the same description, but so small as only to be capable of carrying three or four persons. Here you see a fisherman, in his little dirty heavy lumbering boat, almost like a tub, casting his nets as he floats leisurely down the stream; and there a long narrow cutter, rowed by four or five pair of oars, shoots along like a flying fish—the rowers elegantly dressed, all exactly alike, in white trowsers and waistcoat, scarlet jackets, and sky-blue cravats. These are young noblemen and gentlemen of fortune, rowing themselves up the river for pleasure; for this has always been a favourite amusement with the English, and now it has become the most fashionable one you can engage in. But look! What is that strange, ugly, nondescript looking thing, that comes floundering, and splashing, and roaring along,—driving every thing out of its way, as if the river were its own—with wheels instead of oars, and a smoking chimney for a mast? It is a *steam-boat*, driving down the river, half filled with gaily dressed people, who have been passing the day on Richmond Hill—the Londoner's favourite spot. This late invention is no doubt a very convenient one, and forms a very lively and characteristic addition to the scene before us; but I should think it must harmonize most inharmoniously with the kind of scene which it has just left,—namely, the gliding of a clear river through meadows and green trees. But we shall see soon, for we are going to Richmond shortly, to look at the boasted view from the hill top, and shall use this mode of conveyance; though we all of us anticipate that we shall not be much pleased with it.—Altogether, the face of this river, on a fine day in summer, presents a much more animated and amusing sight than any thing of the kind that I have seen elsewhere.

Before leaving this bridge, I will notice the means by which the enormous funds required for the construction of works of this kind, are raised in England; and it offers an extraordinary example of that spirit of commercial enterprize which is diffused among all classes of the people. The plan for these kind of works is almost invariably originated and set on foot by some architect, who wishes to have *the job* of constructing the work, whatever it may be. When his plan is pretty well matured, he places it in the hands of a few private individuals of known wealth and respectability; and under their sanction and auspices a public meeting is called, at which the details of the plan are developed, the funds likely to be required for carrying it into effect are stated, and the means proposed to raise those funds. These means usually consist in giving each individual, who chooses to become answerable for a certain sum of money, a proportionate *property* in the concern; which property he may either retain in his own hands, and turn to account by means of the interest from the division of the *profits* arising from the work when completed; (from the *toll*, for instance, which is allowed to be charged on the passengers over a bridge, supposing that to be the work in agitation)—or he may dispose of his share in the property at a premium, supposing the plan happens to be generally approved of, and an encreased demand for the shares arises, in anticipation of greater profits than were at first contemplated. All that the person subscribing in the first instance binds himself to, is, to produce his proportion of the funds, when they may be called for by the progress of the work; which he may do either by transferring his share, at a profit or a loss, as it may be; or by paying the first nominal sum for which he subscribed, and taking the risk of a future advance. Thus persons of the most limited means may, and in fact do, have a share in the construction of the finest and most valuable public works of which England can boast, and which works may therefore, much more truly and appropriately than those of any other country, be called public ones. The shares in these kind of undertakings are usually fixed at a very low nominal value; about fifty pounds perhaps; and there are generally bye-laws made by the society, to prevent one person from holding more than a certain number of shares, in order that no unfair or artificial means may be made use of, to raise or depreciate their value.

All the government has to do with infinitely the greater number of these works, (and those in particular which require the most extensive funds, such as canals, bridges, roads, &c.) is to grant an act of parliament, permitting them to be undertaken, or rather, setting aside the legal obstacles which the opposite interests of private individuals would otherwise be able to throw in their way. In the construction of a new road, for instance, an act of parliament is necessary, in order to enable the projectors to possess themselves of such land as the road may be intended to pass through, by compelling the owners to give up all claim to it, on receiving a certain remuneration; the amount of which is assessed by a committee of disinterested persons, appointed by the government for that purpose. An act is also necessary, to enable the proprietors of a new road or bridge to exact a toll from the persons passing over it. By this it will be seen, that the hope of profit, in some way or other, is, invariably, the primary cause which leads to the construction of the public works in this country. The hope of profit to the projectors is the cause which leads to the formation of the *plan* in the first instance; and the funds which enable it to be carried into execution are forthcoming in the hope of the profit that will arise, either in the shape of dividend at its completion, or of premium on the shares during its progress, and before its results can be entirely judged of. In whatever light this manner of raising the funds for the construction of public works in this country may be regarded, it is undoubtedly a most convenient and admirable one. To be sure it reduces the *credit* of them to a mere commercial speculation; but then the country is supplied with works that it could not procure in any other way; the expense of producing them is divided among so many, that it is not seriously felt by any; and labour is supplied and art encouraged in the most extensive manner, without any but the *public* being entitled invidiously to pride themselves on being the cause of all these. It is in this way that all the literary institutions of London have been established, that the national theatres have been erected, the canals dug, the roads formed, and almost every other work of extensive public utility has been produced.

We will now pass along the rest of the Strand to Charing Cross; the space between which and St. Paul's (about a mile) is occupied by shops, without a single private house intervening. Here, at Charing Cross, there is a fine equestrian statue in bronze, of Charles II. In passing this we leave to the left a wide but very irregular street, containing the Admiralty, the Horse Guards, and other public government offices which I have mentioned before, and enter Pall Mall, where the palace inhabited by the present King is situated. At the corner of this fine street stands the theatre of the Italian Opera; and it forms a very striking and handsome commencement to the extensive improvements that are carrying on in this part of the town. The line of buildings to be included in these improvements will, when completed, form the most extensive range of the kind in Europe. An immense number of old and dilapidated buildings have been taken down, and in their place will be erected one continued street, leading from the King's Palace to the Regent's Park—a space of about a mile and three quarters. Nearly half of this line of buildings is in a state of great forwardness—sufficiently so to enable one to judge of its effect as a whole when completed. That effect will, no doubt, be very agreeable and attractive, on account of the endless variety that is to be found in the houses; for, apparently, they are to include every possible style, and no style, of architecture,—from the purest Grecian to the most fantastical non-descript.

There is, however, one part of this street which is in very good taste. It is already nearly finished, and produces a very fine and classical effect, particularly by moonlight; when, from not being at present lighted or inhabited, its quiet, solemn, and truly Grecian air forms a most singular and striking contrast to the scene of noise, light, and bustle that surrounds it. The part to which I allude is a range of buildings which form the quarter of a circle, and from the fronts of which projects, to each side of the carriage-way, a colonnade consisting of a balcony, supported by fluted Doric columns about eighteen feet high. These columns are the best result which has hitherto been seen of an invention in the arts, which is becoming very prevalent in England. It is that of forming in cast-iron a great variety of objects, which were formerly composed of wood or stone; such as gates, fences, pillars, lamp-posts, pavement, &c. The shafts of these columns consist of one single piece of cast-iron, and are painted stone colour, so that they cannot, in appearance, be distinguished from that material.

The dwelling-houses in London are almost all built of brick; which gives an extremely poor and mean appearance to them after the newness is gone off—which it very soon does, from the effect of the climate. But this new range of buildings is to be covered entirely with stucco, forming an exact imitation of stone. This stucco is also a new invention, at least in its present improved state; and it is becoming very prevalent among all the new buildings that are erecting in London and its neighbourhood. It is probable that in the next century there will be scarcely a house presenting to the eye bare brick walls.

I should mention that this new street is an undertaking of the government. But I believe it is pretty generally understood to have been urged upon them by the King; for something of the kind is said to have been long a favourite plan of his; and the whole arrangements are under the immediate controul of his favourite architect—Mr. Nash.

Instead of passing up this new street, we will continue our walk along Pall-mall and up St. James's Street, that we may take a view of Bond Street, the fashionable promenade of London. This is a street filled with shops, and differing in no respect from many other parts of London; but it is here, and in this immediate neighbourhood alone, that the young men of family and fashion indulge the eyes of the canaille, by letting themselves be seen pacing to and fro on the pavé, linked arm in arm with each other. It is here only that you have any chance of observing, except by occasional glimpses, the fashionable *modes* of the day. It is here, too, that you perceive the striking change in the personal appearance of those you meet, as opposed to those you have left in the *city*, and its immediate vicinity. While we are here we may, therefore, as well notice these things a little more closely.—In walking through the streets of London, and more especially in the last mentioned neighbourhood, it is impossible to conceive a set of more low, dull, heavy, sordid, selfish, vulgar, and unintellectual expressions than are observable in the faces of the *men* you meet. This cannot fail to be extremely distasteful and repulsive to foreigners; particularly to the French and Italians, who are accustomed in their own countries to see all that is light, airy, animated, gay, and graceful, in the human face; mixed sometimes, it is true, with not a little of what is exceptionable, as far as it indicates moral habit and feeling, but still which supposes or includes something intellectual. Englishmen of the class of which I am speaking, are, for the most part, better dressed than foreigners of the same class; but there is, generally speaking, no sort of comparison as to their personal appearances, in regard to form as well as face. But when you get to this part of the town, a most striking and agreeable change is observable. There is no nation in which the visible effect of *blood* is so striking as it is among the English. In this part of the town you meet with numbers of the younger branches of noble families; and you may almost to a certainty point them out by their personal appearance alone. I have never seen any thing finer, in form as well as feature, than some of the young Englishmen of this class. Their dress, too, as far as the execrable European costume will permit, is more perfect than any thing I have seen in Paris or elsewhere. As a badly dressed Englishman is the worst dressed person in the world, so a really well dressed one is without exception the best. The long war, too, has made military pursuits the only eligible ones for the younger branches of noble houses; and accordingly you scarcely meet with one of this class who is not in the army; and they have acquired from it a manner and air which nothing else can give.

With respect to the females that you meet in the streets of London, nearly the same may be said as of those in Paris. A woman of fashion and condition is scarcely ever seen out of her carriage, except as she is descending from it to make some purchase, or to look over a tradesman's goods without any intention of making one; which is a favourite morning's occupation with ladies of fashion here. It is in Bond Street, from three to six during the season, that these busy idlers are chiefly to be seen; at which time the street is literally filled with splendid equipages. But here, and in the other parts of London also, you occasionally meet, on foot, very charming and well dressed women belonging to the middle classes of society—much oftener than in Paris, on account of the absence of those inconveniences which exist there; such as the want of a foot-path, &c. It is only in the gardens and public walks that you are likely to meet them there; but here, being no such places, in fine weather you meet them every where.

Passing out of Bond Street at the upper end, we enter Oxford Street; at present the finest street in London; though likely in a few years (as indeed Bond Street itself is, in a still greater degree, for it runs parallel with it) to be superseded by the New Street which I have described above. Oxford Street consists of a straight double line of shops, not less than half a league in length, with a broad foot-path on each side, and a carriage road in the centre, twenty paces wide. This street is also perpetually thronged with splendid equipages, on account of its being the grand avenue into which run most of the side streets leading to the squares, &c. where the nobility and people of fashion reside. We have now got into the neighbourhood of these squares, as they are called, which are deservedly the boast of London. In all this part of the town, north of Oxford Street, there are scarcely any shops; most of the houses being occupied by families of distinction, or by those of rich citizens and merchants who have warehouses and places of business in the city. But this latter class of persons, and the members of the law and other professions, for the most part reside in another quarter of the town still more to the north, and which has been added to the metropolis within a very few years. This is by far the finest part of London; and we shall reach it by and bye. I have before described to you one of these squares. There are several of them in this neighbourhood; and, like that which I have described, they contain houses of an immense variety of sizes, adapted to the wants and means of the persons whose habits and connections require that they should reside in a situation of this kind; for a family that makes any pretensions to mix in fashionable society, *must* reside in a fashionable situation: And in any thing approaching to respectable life in England, there is no such thing as two or more families occupying one house. This perpetual call for separate houses in the fashionable quarter of the town, by persons of different degrees of wealth, accounts for that endless variety in the domestic architecture, which destroys all grandeur and uniformity of effect. In this neighbourhood, and in that of Piccadilly and Bond Street, are situated the large furnished hotels, which offer splendid accommodation to foreigners and families from the country, who occasionally visit London without having permanent residences there. Unlike those of Paris, these hotels furnish every thing that is needed in the way of board, attendance, &c. But they are extremely expensive in their charges.

I do not know that there is any thing else in this neighbourhood calling for particular mention. By the bye, in passing through Piccadilly to arrive at Bond Street, I forgot to lead you into one of the prettiest and most attractive places of the kind in London. It is quite a new building, entirely under cover, and an exact fac-simile of one side of the quadrangle of the Palais Royal; except that there is a double row of shops instead of a single one. This range of shops, which have each a small dwelling attached to them, has been just built, as a commercial speculation, by the nobleman who occupies Burlington House, the grandest private residence in London. I observe that the tradesmen who occupy these shops are of an inferior class, and that the place is very little frequented by persons of respectability. Notwithstanding this, however, the building is the prettiest and most picturesque of the kind in London.—But to tell you the truth, I begin to feel a little tired with our walk; and I dare say you are so too. We will therefore, if you please, finish it another day.

V. S.

LETTER LV.

To begin our walk of to-day where we finished that of last week,—in passing to the north of this quarter, inhabited chiefly by persons of wealth and distinction, we arrive at an entirely new part of London, and one which possesses features quite different from those of the other parts. Here the ornamental character of the external architecture is a little more attended to than has been usual in English dwelling-houses; but I believe internal convenience, as well as strength and durability, have been neglected in proportion. And this is easily accounted for, when it is considered that the erecting of dwelling-houses for the purpose of letting them at an annual rent, is a distinct profession here; and that the capital expended in this way must produce its adequate return of interest, in order to make it worth the builder's while to lay it out. He can therefore afford to offer the tenant either external ornament, or internal convenience;

but not both. And a preference for the former seems of late years to have become much more prevalent in England than it used to be. Now-a-days a person of limited income chooses to dispense with many of the *comforts* (as they are called) which characterised the dwellings of his immediate ancestors, if he can, by doing so, have a pretty Italian-looking cottage to himself, with French windows to let in the cold and damp of the climate, and Venetian blinds and verandas to keep out the sun from an aspect in which it perhaps never shines! Of this description are the innumerable pretty but paltry looking dwellings, which are rising "like exhalations" in the neighbourhood of the New Road. They are chiefly occupied by persons holding inferior situations in government offices, or in the counting-houses of bankers, merchants, &c. in the city. Many of them are so small that the effect of them is quite ludicrous to a foreign eye. They are certainly not larger than the box in which Gulliver was confined, when the Brobdignagian eagle flew away with him. But here any thing is better than living in lodgings. The house is *your own*; and with an Englishman this feeling compensates for every thing. It is a thoroughly national feeling; and I am inclined to think that it leads to very excellent results. He has a proverb, too, which says that "an Englishman's *house* is his castle;" but I suppose this does not extend to his "Lodgings."

Joining to the New Road is another public work of the present King's, undertaken and carried into effect during his Regency. It is called the Regent's Park. It is a tract of ground about five miles in circumference, picturesquely disposed by nature in the form of hill and dale, enclosed by iron railing, and laid out in roads, foot-paths, sheets of water, plantations of trees, &c. and forming altogether a spot that will in a few years be a very delightful addition to this part of the metropolis. Since the continent has been open to them, the English seem to have discovered the wretched want that their city is in of something like our Tuilleries, Luxembourg, and Champs Elysées; and they are endeavouring to supply them in the best way they can. But this and the other parks are too far from the most populous parts of London ever to be of much use to it generally, either in the way of health or amusement. The poorer inhabitants of the city and its immediate vicinity may as well, on the score of time and distance, go into the country at once, when they can get from the horrors of their confined lanes and allies—which are infinitely more noisome and unhealthy than any thing of the kind in Paris.

And accordingly, they do this. On Sunday,—the only day when the lower orders can leave their occupations,—the parks are never frequented by them; they always make their way to some of the adjacent villages, three or four miles from their homes. On the other hand, the middle and higher classes visit the parks alone. Nothing can be more thoroughly *mauvais ton* than to "take a walk in the country" on a Sunday.

In the neighbourhood of the Regent's Park there are two or three ranges of very fine houses, which remain unfinished, because the nobility and persons of fashion will not patronize this part of the town, on account of its being infested with citizens, members of professions, &c.

We will now return to the top of Oxford Street, pass through Hyde, St. James's, and the Green Parks, and get to Westminster; taking a glance as we pass at the elegant back-fronts of the houses which look into the Green Park, and the noble view of the Cathedral of Westminster from this spot. Passing out at the gate of the Horse Guards, and turning to the right, we arrive at a new and very judicious opening which has just been made, in order to afford a view of this exquisite piece of Gothic architecture. It must not be called a piece of antiquity; because the greater part of it has lately been thoroughly repaired and restored, at a vast expense, and may now be supposed to present nearly the same appearance that it did fifty years after it was first erected.

The building which contains the Houses of Lords and Commons, the Courts of Law, &c. is immediately opposite the front of the Abbey; but it is not worthy of any particular notice. We will now cross Westminster Bridge, for the purpose of shewing you a scene more characteristically English than any other we have yet met with. This is a spot where meet in one point all the outlets from London to the great Surry, Sussex, and Kent Roads, leading to all the most frequented sea-port towns and watering places on the coast, and also to a great proportion of the most favourite country-towns and villages which are chosen as the summer residences of the inhabitants of London. This spot is in the front of an Inn, or Public House, called the Elephant and Castle; at which every public conveyance that passes stops for a short time, both in going and coming. I believe this is a rule to which the drivers of these vehicles make no exception, whatever their haste may be, or whether they have occasion to stop there or not. This produces a scene altogether singular in its effect, and perfectly novel and unaccountable in the eyes of foreigners, who have no notion, till they see its consequences exhibited in so lively a manner on this spot, the perfect mania that the English have for moving about from one place to another. There is not a merchant of respectability, and scarcely a substantial tradesman, or upper clerk in a public office, who does not, after business hours,—viz. four o'clock,—either mount his horse or chaise, or some public conveyance, and go home from four to ten or twelve miles to dinner, every day of his life during the summer season; and many do this constantly during the winter too, and return in the same manner to business again by nine or ten in the morning. But it is chiefly the meeting of the public stages at this spot, which causes the extraordinary life, bustle, and animation of the scene to which I am directing your attention. From whatever part of the metropolis the stages going the different roads start, they all stop here; so that persons who do not choose to take their places for any particular hour, or who choose to save half an hour in the time of starting, or who do not know and will not take the trouble to learn at what hour and from whence the stages start by which they wish to travel,—are sure to be right if they come here; for here they all meet and stop; and there are such an extraordinary number of these stages run to all the frequented towns, that you never need wait long without finding a place in one or other of them. For example, during the season when Brighton is frequented, from seven o'clock in the morning till ten at night there are stages pass this spot upon an average every half hour!—and from about eight to ten or eleven in the forenoon, there are frequently three or four Brighton stages to be seen standing here at the same time; all of them supplied with capital horses, and fitted out in the most admirable manner; and many of them performing the journey (of eighteen leagues) in six hours. There are said to be no less than seven hundred stages in summer, and five hundred in winter, stop at the door of this Inn daily throughout the year. By this you may form some idea of the scene which this spot constantly exhibits. And it is astonishing to observe the admirably cool, deliberate, and methodical manner in which all this immense traffic is conducted. There is never the slightest appearance of hurry or confusion. All goes on as if by clockwork. There is one man belonging to the Inn who can tell you to a minute what time any stage you may enquire for will be at the door; and you may go into the house, and observe at your ease all that is passing, secure that when it does arrive, and is about to start again, he'll send the coachman in to call you. But the scene outside is the most enlivening.

Fancy to yourself twenty stages of different forms and colours, all handsomely decorated, and drawn by *blood* horses, harnessed and caparisoned in as elegant a manner as those of gentlemens' equipages are with us; within and on the top of which are seated from ten to eighteen well dressed passengers —for here every body but respectable females and old people prefer going on the outside. Fancy these vehicles to have either just drawn up, or to be on the point of starting again, or some of them started, while others are arriving to take their places; thus causing a perpetual motion, bustle, and change among them. Round every one of these you may suppose several persons collected, —either taking leave of friends who are going on their journey; or making enquires for, or welcoming friends whose arrival they had been waiting in expectation of; or preparing to start themelves, but uncertain, among the multiplicity of conveyances that offer themselves, which they shall go by. Add to these, persons offering for sale fruit, cakes, &c.; others with a supply of the daily newspapers, which the travellers may not have had an opportunity of procuring before they left home; others arriving with, or carrying away the luggage of the passengers, &c. &c.; the whole enlivened by the perpetually recurring signals of the drivers, signifying that they are ready to start,—" *now, Sir, if* *you please*," and the invariably repeated question of "*all right?*" before they do start:—fancy all this to occur in the open street, at the meeting point of five populous roads, up and down every one of which *streams* of pedestrians and of conveyances of all kinds are perpetually crossing and recrossing each other; and add a few of the associations connected with the circumstances that make up the subject of contemplation; and you have before you a scene that, in its kind, is not to be paralleled in the world.

I intended to have noticed the principal public charities, which form so distinguishing a feature of the English Metropolis, in a separate letter. But as we are in the immediate neighbourhood of several of them, we may as well take a look at the outsides of them now. Within a few hundred yards of the spot on which we are now standing, there are no less than six public Institutions for the relief of the wants and calamities of the destitute; all of them supported by purely voluntary contributions, and all on a most extensive and magnificent scale. The most remarkable of these is an Hospital for the reception of Lunatics. This building has just been erected here at an immense cost; the Institution having been removed from another part of the town. The terms in which I must describe even the exterior of this building cannot fail to seem extravagant to you. It is, merely as an object of sight, and as an ornament to the metropolis, infinitely superior to most of the Royal Palaces; and must have been erected at a greater cost. The approach to it is by a large fore-court, enclosed by superb iron gates and railing; and containing in the centre a handsome shrubbery, surrounded by gravel walks, &c. In the front, from the top of a flight of stone steps, rises an elegant and perfectly classical Ionic portico, consisting of six columns, about thirty feet in height, supporting an appropriate entablature and pediment. At the back of this portico rises a dome, forming the top and centre of the middle compartment of the building,—which projects a little from the wings. These latter are of immense extent; and the whole is built uniformly, and in the neatest possible manner, of light-coloured bricks. The number of windows in front is one hundred and eighty! There are large grounds and offices of different kinds attached, and the whole is surrounded by a high wall; except the front entrance, which consists of massive iron gates, connected by an open railing corresponding in length to the centre compartment of the building.

I believe the next in extent and importance, of the six charitable institutions that I have described as being immediately in this neighbourhood, is the Asylum for the Deaf and Dumb; where they are taught, clothed, and supported in every respect, till they arrive at a certain age, and are qualified to earn their subsistence. The building belonging to this institution, and also that for the Indigent Blind, who are taught, clothed, and supported in the same manner, are very spacious, and constructed in the most substantial, appropriate, and at the same time elegant manner.

The other three public charities in this neighbourhood are the Philanthropic Society, for the reception and reclaiming of destitute and abandoned children; the Asylum for female Orphans; and the Magdalen, for the reception of prostitutes who may choose to quit their course of life, and return to one of comparative respectability. To each of these three last institutions there is attached a public chapel, to which persons attending pay a small sum for admission. I believe it is from the funds arising in this manner, that these three institutions derive a considerable share of their income; for these chapels are made as *attractive* as possible, by the engagement of popular preachers, the elegance and commodiousness of their fittings up, and the music and singing which are introduced into the service. If this is making religious worship a means rather than an end—giving it a subservience to other purposes—those purposes are at least admirable in themselves; and it is undoubtedly a most ingenious method of extracting money from the idle and the vain, who would probably not contribute it under other circumstances.

We will now return into the heart of London, through the suburb adjoining to another of the bridges—that of the Blackfriars. This fine wide road, exactly a mile in length, and perfectly straight, is bounded at one end by the bridge rising into a very elevated arch, and at the other end by the handsome arched gateway forming the front to the Asylum and School for the Indigent Blind. This road, particularly when lighted up by gas,—which by this time we will suppose it to be,—forms one of the handsomest *coups-d'œil* of the kind in London; but it is greatly inferior to several of the same description in Paris, and other great towns of France. The street itself differs from that of other parts of London, in not being paved; and this, together with the life and bustle that is constantly to be seen upon it, likens it, in a slight degree, to the Boulevards; but it wants the trees, as well as the gaiety, spirit, and variety, of those most amusing parts of the most amusing place in the world.

On crossing the bridge of the Blackfriars (so called from a convent which formerly stood in this neighbourhood, inhabited by a brotherhood of Dominicans, who gave themselves that title) we find ourselves again in the heart of the city. But the scene has undergone a striking change since we passed through it before. The illumination of the streets and shops by inflammable gas has become universal in London within the last five or six years; and the effect of it on the appearance of the town at night is certainly very striking and agreeable. We are accustomed to think the streets of Paris well lighted; particularly before the shops are closed for the night. But they would offer a scene of comparative gloom and darkness by the side of the principal streets of London,—which present literally a blaze of light; for, besides the public lamps which are fixed at regular intervals, a great proportion of the shops have a private lamp affixed in the front of them; and every shop has from three or four to eight or ten burners withinside, each giving a clearer and stronger light than those of our best Argand lamps. This change in the plan of lighting the streets has also caused another admirable and complete revolution in the state of the metropolis at night. Formerly it was not safe to walk even in the principal streets after night-fall; nothing being more common than for persons to walk quietly up to you, seize your watch or money from your pockets, and walk off with it without any one attempting to molest them. This boldness of the street thieves of London had, until the new mode of lighting the town, arrived at a pitch that would not be credible in other countries, where the nature of the government permits the police to be more strict. But at present this enormous evil is greatly abated—the principal streets being now nearly as light, and consequently as safe, at midnight as they are at mid-day.

We will now, as far as description goes, close our long walk at St. Paul's Cathedral, where we began it, and return home—reflecting by the way on the resemblances and differences that would present themselves between this walk, and one of the same kind in our own metropolis. Here we have the same endless routine of houses, shops, carts, carriages, and human faces; the same noise, bustle, life, character, and variety of costume: but in no other respect do the two capitals bear any general resemblance to each other; and in no respect will the English one bear any comparison, as to general effect, with of France; or offer any one claim to superiority in point of detail, except in the width of the streets, the pavement for foot passengers, and the squares with enclosed gardens. Here, we miss all the impressiveness of the general effect arising from architectural grandeur and uniformity; we miss the blended elegance and convenience of the public fountains, and have in their place pumps, as they are called: little square or round erections, sticking bolt upright like a gate-post, with a handle projecting from one side to lever the water up from below, and an iron ladle dangling to the front, for the thirsty to drink out of, but which they are obliged to fill by their own labour, or their thirst must go unquenched. We miss the elegant and well painted *signs* to the shops, which give to some of the streets the appearance of an exhibition room; we miss the tasty variety in the decorations and colouring of the outsides of the shops, the sun-blinds, balconies, &c. which give the air of an eastern bazaar; we miss the completeness and finish of the female dresses, and their endless variety and admirable adaptation of colours, and the characteristic differences of the mens' dress,—the caps of the *canaille*, the smart round hats of the petit-maitres, and the lofty cocked hats of the military and the beaux of the old regime. Among living objects, too, we miss the Limonadiers, with their silvered and gilt fountains, their bronzed countenances, and their tinkling bells; we miss the pretty flower girls, with their tasty little bouquets, their graceful and conscious airs, and their beseeching tones and looks, not to be resisted. We miss also the intense life and character of the Boulevards; the stall-keepers with their hundred different articles all at one price; the groups of Savoyard musicians, with their confidently modest deportment, their piquant looks, and their finished dress; the happy-looking idlers in the front of Cafés, beneath the trees, and the pairs of loungers on chairs leaning towards each other,—the one talking, and the other hearing and looking, of love, and both conscious of being the subject of envy and observation. We miss the booths of the mountebanks, conjurers, grimaciers, and exhibitors of all kinds, with the eager and animated groups that surround them; we miss these, and a thousand other sights of the same kind. But above all, we miss the enchanting gardens of the Tuilleries and the Luxembourg, the splendid public edifices, the rich and unrivalled *coups d'œil* from the Place de Louis XV.; the Quay des Tuilleries, the bridges, &c. And finally, we miss the exquisitely bright and pellucid atmosphere that envelopes the whole as in a case of chrystal, and gives a liquid clearness and brilliance to the effect of every part, that cannot be conceived of by persons accustomed to live in a mist, as one does here; but which cannot be properly noticed and appreciated till one *has* lived here for some time, in order to see and feel the difference. Adieu for the present.

V. S.

LETTER LVI.

This sagest of people, the English, indulge themselves so little in the agreeable fooleries of society and custom—they allow so very small a portion of the year to be set apart for mere pleasure—to be wasted on mere enjoyment—that it is but fair for me to tell you something of that little, and the manner in which it is employed. I am just now in the humour to do so; for the festivities (so they must be called, by comparison) of Christmas-time are just ended, and we have again risen (as *they* call it, but *sunk*, as I call it) into that solemn monotony which makes up the grand sum of English life; the sullen stream of which is never disturbed and enlivened by little turns and eddies of this kind, except at this particular period. It is true there are a few other days which the common people, the mere vulgar, (always wiser than their betters) still persist in squandering away on happiness, instead of seriously attending to their respective duties of getting their daily bread. These are at Easter (our *Paque*); Whitsuntide (*Pentécôte*); and Michaelmas (*La Saint Michel*). But as these festivities, such as they are, are confined solely to the very lowest classes of the people, they cannot be spoken of as in any degree connected with or influencing the general character of society.

The only period at which the English, generally, step from the pedestal of their wisdom, and condescend to walk in the paths of a wiser folly, is at Christmas-time; that is to say, during the twelve days from Christmas-day (our *Jour de Noël*), to what they call Twelfth-day (*Jour des Rois*); the first and last of these days, and New Year's-day, (our *Jour de l'an*) being those chiefly devoted to gaiety; and these (or rather the first and last) being the only ones on which any particular ceremonies or old customs are permitted to hold any sway.

The approach of Christmas-tide is announced in London, and I believe in other parts of England, in a very pleasing manner. During a fortnight before Christmas-day arrives, you are every now and then awakened, in the middle of the night, by a sweet low music, proceeding from various instruments, and very agreeably performed. The effect of this is very peculiar. Being at a distance in the street below, and also continually in motion, it scarcely has the power fully to awaken you before it ceases to be audible; so that it produces an indistinct impression, like that of music heard in a dream. And, in fact, it frequently has the effect of causing you to *dream* of music, without at all awakening you; influencing the mental powers during sleep as sounds are frequently known to do. This music is called "The Waits," and is played by itinerant bands of musicians, who, after Christmas-day, apply for a small douceur at the different houses included in their round. There is another preparatory note heard about the same time, which is not so pleasant, but more characteristic: this is the Bell-man's, as he is called. He is one of the petty officers of the parish police, who goes about during the night, ringing a large ill-sounding bell, and chaunting, in a still more ill-sounding voice, certain doggrel verses, referring to the approaching period. He also comes for his douceur after Christmas-day; and leaves at each house a copy of his verses. I cannot help here mentioning what I have just learned by accident from M——, and which is very characteristic of this gravest of people,—for the Spaniards must certainly cede this point of superiority to the English. It is the custom for the inhabitants of every house, perhaps without exception, to give something on these occasions to the bell-man, who wakes them from their comfortable sleep with his hollow tolling bell and croaking voice; but to the Waits, who bring them pleasant music, and perhaps pleasanter dreams, not one in twenty gives any thing. To be awakened by music, that means nothing and leads to nothing, is an impertinence, and they will not encourage it; but to be roused from their slumbers by the parish beadle, whom they see about the street every day, reminds them of their affairs, their duties, their daily occupation; it "comes home (as one of their greatest writers says) to their business and bosoms;" and they willingly reward the instrument of it accordingly! At all events there is no denying that this plan, of making somebody *interested* in reminding the English that their time for being happy is at hand, is a lucky custom; for without it they would most probably forget the circumstance till the appointed time was gone by, or would overlook it altogether!

These are the indications of the approach of Christmas-day. It's arrival is announced and indicated in a no less pleasing manner; namely, by the interior of every house, particularly those parts of it devoted to the servants' offices, &c. being decorated all over with portions of those evergreen shrubs which are so much cultivated in this country, and which, in many parts of the vicinity of London, give to a fine sun-shiny day in the depth of winter, all the appearance of a summer's morning. Sprigs of these evergreens, such as laurel, bay, ilex, holley, &c., but particularly the latter, with its gay glittering leaves, and bright red berries, are stuck in the windows and over the mantlepieces, and wreaths of them hung against the walls. And in the kitchen, or the servants' hall, a large bunch of mistletoe is suspended from the ceiling, underneath which the maidens are liable to be kissed, if they are caught by the male part of the household.

The stiff manners and fastidious taste of the present race of English, have nearly exploded this, and other similar portions of the Christmas customs, from the metropolis and its neighbourhood, except among the servants. But I believe that, in the more distant parts of the country, it still prevails throughout every part of the family; together with numerous other relics of old times, which are entirely forgotten or unknown here.

These evergreens are also hung up in large quantities, in different parts of all the religious edifices connected with the established church; and they give a very pleasing appearance to the otherwise bare and chill aspect which, generally speaking, belongs to these buildings. These ornaments, both in the houses and churches, are suffered to remain for a considerable time after Christmas is over.

Though parties and visiting, of every kind, and in every class of life, are more prevalent about Christmas-time than they are during the previous part of the year, yet it is not till Christmas-day that the festivities of the season can properly be said to begin. On that particular day the parties are chiefly confined to the houses of the heads of families, where all the junior and collateral branches are invited, and, generally speaking, *only* these; though occasionally, a few intimate friends, who may, from the peculiar circumstances of their situation in life, not be likely to have family engagements, are called upon to join the party. We accompanied M—— to one of these meetings, at the house of a relation of the family, and found it much more pleasant than any thing of the kind we have before met with here. The absence of the usual mixture, of intimate friends and mere acquaintance, occasioned a corresponding absence of all that restraint, stiffness, and formality, which are the sins of English society in general, and which absolutely preclude that perfect freedom and familiarity of intercourse—that absolutely careless and unceremonious ease—without which merely pleasant society cannot exist. That brilliant society which is got together on a principle of selection, and which we once enjoyed in such unrivalled, and, indeed, unapproached perfection in France just before the revolution, does not require this entire freedom and familiarity of intercourse, and this intimate acquaintance of each of its members with all the others: or rather, perhaps, it precludes these altogether, or *they* preclude *it*. But the value of the society of which I am now speaking, entirely depends on every member of it feeling (though unconsciously) that he may be thinking of exactly what he pleases, and saying it in the manner and at the moment that best please him; that he may talk sense, or nonsense, or not at all, just as he feels in the mood; and that which ever of these, or whatever else, he may choose to do, he is sure to please, because he is with those who *will* be pleased with him, if he be but cheerful and good-natured. The parties on this day are all dinner parties, and are usually fixed at an earlier hour than the common one, (which is now exceedingly late) in order to allow a longer time for the hilarities of the evening. The ladies, too, on these occasions, remain longer at the dinner-table than they usually do, and the gentlemen sooner join them in the drawing-room. Singing, too, which has long been exploded at private dinner parties, as the depth of *mauvais ton*, is not absolutely excluded; and, to my thinking, a well sung song or glee, in a private room, is infinitely better than a score of the same infinitely better sung on the stage. The after effect, too, of a repose like this, introduced into the conversation, is very pleasing. Conversation, however free and familiar it may be, will flag now and then, but for some break or resting-place of this kind. The English custom of drinking toasts and healths, which has also for some time past been laid aside in good society, is on these occasions resumed. And supposing the plan, of sitting at the dinner-table after the cloth is withdrawn, to be one conducive to the purposes of convivial meetings of this kind, (which I cannot help thinking it is, under certain restrictions and regulations) then the plan of drinking toasts and sentiments is, undoubtedly, a very skilful and even necessary addition to it; and indeed, without something like this, its chief purposes, of rousing, stimulating, and keeping up a round of general conversation, could not be nearly so well obtained. But the effect of this assistance chiefly depends on the person at the head of the table, and on the manner in which he avails himself of it as the means of cutting short a tedious discussion, stopping or turning the current of an obnoxious subject, giving a fillip to the talk when it flags, or otherwise using the unlimited authority which is on these occasions given to him. With these means, skilfully applied, I think the plan in question, of sitting over the wine for two or three hours after dinner, may be made the occasion of calling forth a more various and altogether a more attractive kind of social intercourse than any other—whether it be among a mixed general society of intimate friends, like the one we are now speaking of, or a select meeting of wits and literati, where spirit, brilliancy, and *effect* are the order of the day. I think this *may* be the case, and that in fact it *would* be the case in France, where the stimulus required is so little, and where the partakers of it would generally know when they had received enough of it. But I am afraid that, among the hard-headed and phlegmatic English, the abandoning this plan, or at least confining it within very narrow bounds, as they have done now, generally speaking, was a wise measure; for these meetings, besides the necessities and habits they were the means of creating, very frequently led to the very worst immediate consequences, from many of the partakers in them not knowing when to stop, or not choosing to stop while they could go on. Nothing can be clearer than the reason for the different habits of a Frenchman and an Englishman with respect to wine; or at least, for the origin of those habits. A Frenchman has the sense to know that he does not need an external stimulus to make him happy; he feels his blood dance through his veins of its own free will; and *therefore* he takes little wine, and that little merely as a pleasant and necessary beverage. An Englishman has the sense to know that he does need a stimulus from without to make *him* happy; he feels his blood creep sluggishing along through his veins like a wintry stream; and *therefore* he takes wine to warm, vivify, and quicken it. And when he has once found the value of an expedient like this, he determines to resort to it constantly, not caring for the equivalent evils attending it, or not choosing to see them; for he is as capable of seeing them, if he would, as any one else.

But I am forgetting my immediate subject. The after part of Christmas-day is even more unrestrained, and therefore more pleasant, than that part of it which is passed at the dinner table. Now, the younger branches of the different families assembled, who came from school during the preceding week, are all admitted into the drawing-room; and for the rest of the evening the most hearty and unceremonious gaiety and good humour prevail. The inroad of these little Goths and Vandals is the signal for the overthrow of any remaining stiffness and formality, and for the commencement of all sorts of trifling games and sports, which an Englishman would consider as utterly foolish on any other occasion—as worse than a loss of time to witness or indulge in, except "to please the children."

And I must confess that these latter are, generally speaking, worth going out of one's way to please, even if in doing so he were paining rather than pleasing himself. In fact, the English children come nearer to my notion of what children should be, than any that I have ever seen. Our own are ladies and gentlemen, compared with them: which is saying that ours are as far as possible removed from this notion. After the age of six or seven years, a French child is a little man or woman; a little wit, or gallant, or philosopher; a little prude, or precieuse, or coquet; any thing but a child. But the English children, even till the age of thirteen and fourteen, *are* children; they are young, thoughtless, heedless, untaught, unteachable, untameable animals: as wild as their nature intended they should be, and as happy; exulting in the power of their youth, and using it to its only wise and true end; not looking backward to the past, or onward to the future; not fearing, or wishing, or calculating, or conjecturing—but only feeling and living: for, in childhood, to feel and to live is to hope and to be happy,—provided the wickedly foolish expedients of wisdom and prudence do not interfere to frustrate the intentions of nature. A child that has lived its life fitly may die when it will, without its death being a subject for tears and lamentations,—at least as regards itself: for it *has* lived. But a poor little creature, whose childhood is cultivated into a premature perfection; whose whole hopes and expectations are directed to the time when it is to be what it is not, and to have what it has not; whose life is an anticipation of what it hopes to enjoy, not an enjoyment of what it is;—if such a one as this chance to die before it reaches the wished for and promised goal, it has been foolishly and indeed wickedly robbed of its true heritage, and might as well not have been born; for it has died without having lived. I shall continue this subject in my next letter.

V. S.

LETTER LVII.

I CAN readily perceive that, but for the children, the good old national customs of England, relative to this particular period of the year, would very soon become mere vulgarisms, and sink into total disuse. The English always want an excuse for being happy. They are susceptible of enjoyment as well as their neighbours; but you must not hope to persuade them that enjoyment is the business of life. They know better. It is very well in its way; and may be not without its uses, like every thing else; but they are too wise to fool away their lives upon it. When a man comes to die, howmust he feel when he reflects that he has done nothing better than be happy throughout a whole long life? It is not to be thought of! There is a time for all things. He can be happy with the children, in order to make *them* happy; but to partake in happiness for his own sake, is evidently an idle, not to say a wicked, waste of time!

Let us admit, however, that the English make up for this in some degree, even to themselves, by the manner in which they treat their children. They are evidently very fond of them; and their fondness is of the right sort. Accordingly, they do not insist on their being as wise as themselves; but let their youthful spirits take their free course, as much, probably, as it would be safe to do under the present circumstances of society. And probably, in so doing, they live over again their own youth, and in some measure make up for its loss —instead of continuing, as we do, our youth throughout all our life; or rather, instead of ceasing, as we do, to be men and women, the moment we arrive at years of maturity. There is no denying that French parents are but too apt to regard their children, for a considerable length of time, as rivals, rather than as parts of themselves, or as other selves in whom they can live their life over again. But this mischievous and denaturalizing feeling scarcely ever shews itself in this country. An English father is proud of his son, long before he ceases to be proud of himself; and very frequently he ceases to think of himself at all, the moment he has children to whom he can transfer this feeling. An English mother glories in the attractions of her daughter, long before she has lost her own, and is, generally speaking, eager to cede her own pretensions, in favour of one in whom she sees her former self as well as her present: for the English, however inferior they may be to the French in fancy and taste, have at least as much sensibility, and infinitely more imagination. The few real sources of enjoyment that they do possess, are all external from themselves; and they have the faculty, notwithstanding the general selfishness of their character, of going more and further out of themselves, and to better purpose, than any other nation. The Germans have as much imagination as the English, and make as much use of the faculty which this affords them of going out of themselves—as *much* use, but not as *good*. When they leave themselves, and the real world about them, they only get into *another* world; but the English get into a *better*. The latter are the best reasoners of any other civilized people; and the best use they ever make of their reason is when they thus bring it in aid of their imagination, and make each mutually adapt and conform itself to the other. Their best poets have been their best reasoners, and are so in a particular manner in the present day; and their best poetry is the result of this wise union of reason and imagination.

But I am afraid *your* reason, as well as your imagination, are calling upon me to desist from these speculations, and return to my subject of

Christmas-day. I will do so, and endeavour not to quit it again till I have told you all else that seems interesting in the customs and habits that arise out of it here.

The evening of Christmas-day is passed in a very easy and cheerful manner, altogether different from those of any of the other regular parties that we have been invited to here. There are three or four apartments open; and the different portions of the company assort together, and partake in different kinds of amusement, as their inclination may lead them. The elder portion of the company converse, or play at cards, or sit still and look on; the youthful part play, or sing, or make up a little dance to the piano; and the children join in such games and sports as lead to comic results; such as forfeits, blind-man's buff, &c.—making as much noise, and acting and talking as much nonsense, as they please. Tea, coffee, &c. are handed about at intervals; and towards the end of the evening supper is introduced. This is a custom nearly in disuse at present, except during this period of the year,—when it is renewed, probably from an unconscious feeling of the desirableness of collecting the party together round the same table before they separate; as it was probably laid aside, as a general practice, from an equally unconscious feeling of its being in every respect ill adapted to the incongruous medley of persons that make up the sum of English mixed society. Here, as at dinner, healths, toasts, and songs are again introduced; and the party breaks up at a rather early hour, on account of the children who are present, and who on this occasion are permitted to remain till the rest of the company retire.

I should have mentioned that there is a particular fare which is indispensable at an English Christmas dinner—which is usual at *every* dinner during the whole of Christmas-time, but which is looked for at a Christmas-day dinner as a matter of course, and is never absent from it. This is an enormous piece of roasted beef at the bottom of the table in the first course, an almost equally enormous plum-pudding in the centre in the last course, and a quantity of a certain kind of pastry called mince pies. The latter of these dishes, the mince pies, are never introduced at an English dinner except at this particular period; and the plum-pudding very seldom,—though it is incomparably the best composition that the English kitchen produces in this way. This English custom, of having a particular fare on this particular day, is perhaps without exception the most universal of any that prevails in this country. Probably there is not a single table spread on Christmas-day throughout the land,—from the king's, to the lowest artizan's that can scrape together enough to buy him a dinner at all,—that is not furnished with roast beef and plum-pudding. And there is scarcely a town or village in the country, where this fare is not provided gratuitously, by some of the rich inhabitants of the place, for the very poorest who choose to partake of it, and have no other means of procuring it.

V. S.

LETTER LVIII.

On the day after Christmas-day it is that the regular holidays commence. Then it is, and for several days after, that there is little work done in this least idle of all cities; then it is that, during the morning, the custom of asking for and giving Christmas-boxes is practised, and then it is that the money thus obtained is spent, as it should be, in making merry at night, either at the theatres,—which were closed on the two preceding evenings, but are now re-opened with all kinds of extravagant entertainments purposely adapted for the "holiday-folks," (as those who are vulgar enough to try to be happier than their neighbours are called)—or at the different houses of entertainment that are open in every part of the town, for the reception of the lower classes of the people.

Perhaps, of all the defects in the moral constitution of society in this country, the greatest and the most unequivocal is, the almost total absence of places of public amusement in any respect adapted to the habits and circumstances of the lower classes. The only places professing to offer to them any thing like amusement at all, are the theatres; and these are so extravagantly expensive, and in other respects so almost exclusively contrived for the accommodation of the middling and upper classes, that they scarcely offer an exception to the rule I am disposed to lay down, that the classes in question are absolutely *compelled* to be depraved, dissolute, and debauched, in their own defence. They have no alternative. To a man who has been labouring unceasingly for twelve hours during the day, something more than rest from that labour is required at night; something like amusement and dissipation is as much a necessary of life to him, as the food he eats or the air he breathes. He has a right to seek for it, and has a positive claim to have the means of it provided for him, or at all events to have them not withheld from him. And it is still more the policy than it is the duty of his governors to provide for his wants in this way, and still more dangerous to withhold *them* than the common necessaries of animal life,—which all governments hold themselves bound to provide for their subjects in some way or other. In England, this provision for the amusement of the lower orders seems to have been entirely overlooked; and the consequence is that in England, more strikingly than in any other part of the world, notwithstanding her comparatively free constitution, the lower orders are, almost to a man, restless, discontented, and factious; hating their superiors with a degree of virulence that is unparalleled in the history of nations, and losing no occasion of shewing that hatred, and of shewing that they glory in it. And how should it be otherwise? The English mechanics and artizans, and the labouring classes of every kind, when they have finished their day's work, have no earthly occupation left but to congregate together at the public-houses, (as the places are called where beer and spirits are sold) and talk to each other on the passing events of the day; which talk affords them occasion for little else than to compare their own situation with that of their betters, and to draw their inferences and conclusions accordingly. In every other country of civilized Europe, but particularly in France, the lower classes, after their day's labour is over, have the choice of an infinite variety of amusements in every way adapted to their circumstances; and, when this is the case, there is little fear of their troubling their heads about the affairs of the nation. The French water-carrier is too happy over his bottle of thin beer, and too interested in his game of dominos, to think of making comparisons between himself and his governors, unless it be in his own favour. What cares the Parisian peruquier how the world goes, so long as he can enjoy his *bal paré* for half a franc, or take his seat in the pit of the best theatre in Paris, and see one of Moliere's farces, for a dozen sous?* But the English of the same class are absolutely precluded from any thing of this kind. Dancing, except above a certain rank, is forbidden by law! From the theatres they are excluded, partly by the price, but chiefly by the situations which are assigned to them being at such a distance from the stage that they cannot hear a word of what passes there. From meeting together at the coffee-houses, and other establishments of this description, they are prevented by the enormous charges; these places being in England exclusively intended for the middling and upper classes. The sole resource that they have are the public-houses, where beer and spirits are sold. At each of these there is usually a very small room, affording merely the wretched accommodation of bare wooden benches and tables, where they may sit and take their liquor, but where the admission of any thing like amusement is out of the question, except such as they can make among themselves, by telling each other bitter truths about their own situations, and reasoning (for the most illiterate of them are reasoners) on the differences and distinctions of society, and on the right and title of their betters to create and preserve these distinctions, to their own especial pleasure and advantage. And you are to understand that, in consequence of the almost unlimited freedom of the press in this country, there are never wanting writers to suggest reflections of this nature, and some one or other in every knot of public-house politicians to get these suggestions by heart, and retail them out from time to time for the gratification of his own spleen and vanity, as well as for the benefit and instruction of his hearers. In a state of circumstances like this, the wonder is, not that there is so much faction and discontent among the lower orders, but that any thing like a free government and a wide distinction of ranks can possibly maintain themselves at all for any length of time together. I may perhaps find time hereafter to enter more minutely into this most interesting part of the moral and political constitution of English society; but at present I willingly leave it, for matter at all events more attractive, if not more important.

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* I suppose the writer alludes to the allowed practice of selling the pass checks at the doors of the different theatres, after a portion of the performance is over; a practice infinitely better adapted to the public accommodation than our second-price.—TR.

Notwithstanding all the disadvantages that the lower orders labour under, from the want of a just and judicious provision being made for their amusement, during Christmas-time at least they will and do amuse themselves, if not as well as they might and ought, as well as they can: for the craving after amusement is a natural appetite of the human mind, and requires a highly artificial state of society indeed to repress it altogether:—a state to which a certain class of the English seem almost to have reached, but which the lower classes of a country (always the most natural of any) never *can* reach.

I must admit, however, that incomparably the best species of amusement the lower, or indeed any other class of the English, enjoy at this period, consists in the pantomimes that are always provided at the theatres immediately after Christmas-day. The *excuse* for these, as usual, is the children; but for those who are lucky enough to understand the wisdom of nonsense, they need no excuse. As we are totally without this kind of entertainment on the continent, I shall, in my next letter, give you a general description of them; which I have no hope, however, of making half so amusing as a single laugh of the Clown, or a single leap of the Harlequin: but it may serve to give you a notion of the only sort of theatrical entertainment that can in any way be said to be peculiar to the English. I do not of course mean that the Harlequin, Clown, Pierrot, Columbine, &c. that are peculiar to these pieces, are of English origin; but that the uses made of these characters, and the piece itself as a consistent *drama*, formed on a certain plan, and tending to a certain end, are not to be found any where but on the modern English stage.

V. S.

LETTER LIX.

An English pantomime is thus constructed: a story is first chosen, either from that rich fund of invention, the "Arabian Nights' Entertainments," or from some of the "story-books" which every country possesses, the contents of which each thinks peculiar to itself, but which may pretty safely be pronounced to have had some remote and unknown, but identical origin, and to be, under some modification or other, common to all;—some fairy-tale, which must include (as indeed they almost all do) a distressed damsel, beautiful and virtuous beyond compare; a lover of this lady, young, handsome, bold, and generous, and of course favoured by the lady, or *to be* favoured by her at the first glance; another lover, old, or foolish, or ugly, or cowardly, or all these, and of course hated by the lady; and a father, cruel, silly, and avaricious, and equally, "of course," encouraging the rejected lover, and rejecting the encouraged one—the latter being always poor, and the former rich. To these must be added, in the human department, a servant to each of the parties, in whose character cunning and cowardice are the only necessary ingredients. The supernatural machinery of this silent mock heroic must consist of certain good fairies or spirits, who take the part of the youthful couple, and bad ones who interest themselves with equal ardour in favour of the opposite party. The introductory portion of the piece usually commences at the moment when both the male lovers are urging their pretensions, and when matters seem likely to come to a wrong conclusion, unless some higher influence should interfere to give them a turn. This want of present success on the side of desert is usually made to arise out of some little act of imprudence, or disobedience to the commands of the protecting fairy, which is followed by the temporary displeasure of the said fairy, and the consequent partial success of the bad fairy's plans in favour of *his* protegées; the good fairy's punishment being that the lovers shall change their forms and undergo a pilgrimage for a certain time previous to their final union and happiness, and the bad fairy's power enabling him to change the forms of the other parties, and permit *them* to follow the lovers wherever they go, and never to let them rest for a moment. In order to all this, each party is endowed with certain powers and attributes leading to the respective ends in view: the lovers are changed into harlequin and columbine; in other words, into personifications of the perpetual motion, and withal as gay, graceful, handsome, and vivacious as ever: the doting father and the foolish lover become beau-idéals of the stupid and the ridiculous, but withal nearly as extraordinary as the others in their locomotive powers, and altogether nondescript in their appearance; and the servant of each party respectively is changed into an imp of agility and mischief—a figure of fun, frolic, drollery, and extravagance; each exercising all his qualities and powers to the hindrance and annoyance of the other party, and the furtherance of the views of his own—which views are simply to catch, on the one hand, and to avoid being caught on the other.

At the conclusion of the introductory part, the different characters are all collected together,—lovers, father, servants, fairies, and all. The above changes, in appearance, object, character, quality, &c. all take place in a moment, at the touch of the fairies' wands. The parties are then left to themselves, they start fair,—the young lovers having the first chance; and the chace and bustle begin. You see this plan is simple enough for a French tragedy, in point of story; and the unities are equally attended to as to time! But with respect to *place*, there is some little difference; for I question if there ever was an English pantomime in which the parties did not touch at every quarter of the known world in the space of its allotted two hours; to say nothing of numerous collateral excursions to the moon, the stars, the clouds, the bottom of the sea, and elsewhere! The chief agent in all these changes of scene is harlequin, who is gifted by the good fairy with a wand which is capable of executing all his wishes. In one of those dramatic critiques, which are as much sought after here as they are with us, but which are, generally speaking, far from being done with such gaiety and spirit as ours are, I have met with a passage giving so lively a sketch of the attributes of this fantastical being, this harlequin, that I shall take the trouble of translating it for you, instead of attempting to improve on the description myself.*

"If the feeling of envy could at all be admitted during the witnessing of a pantomime, we should sometimes be half disposed to indulge in it, when we see any one transformed into that exquisite compound of mirth, magic, and humanity, Harlequin. All people think, (or protest they think—which amounts to the same thing) that they would rather be themselves than anybody else; so that, not to be singular, we shall not absolutely wish to change our state. But certainly, the next best thing to being one's self, must be to be Harlequin. He is 'full of most blessed condition.' What a shape and make he has! what grace, and lightness, and agility! what a dress and address! Then what a temper! his honest black face is always laughing. Like most heroes, his possessions are confined to his sword. But then what a sword! It includes nothing less than the qualities of Fortunatus's cap, Aladdin's lamp, the philosopher's stone, and the elixir of life. Then what a traveller he is? the clouds are his chariot, and the winds his horses—and he never stops to change or pay turnpikes, but goes all round the globe in a single night,—calling at the moon in his way. And what a delicious *compagnon de voyage* he has!—the first pretty girl he meets with after he is created (for he hasn't the trouble of being born) falls in love with him, and follows him all the world over. Then he always has the start of a train of stupid pursuers, who have only just wit enough to keep him on the *qui vive!* without which even *his* spirits might sometimes flag—at least if he chanced to visit England in November. He doesn't keep house neither—which is an immense advantage; but can make himself at home every where, without carrying letters of recommendation; for every body likes him—which is much; and he does not hate any body—which is more. Then he is never without attendants, though he has not the plague of keeping servants; for the elements obey him a little better than they did the philosopher in Rasselas. He can make old time go forward or backward, or stand still—can change dreams into realities and realities into dreams, just as he likes,—and night into day and day into night—which is a very pleasant thing occasionally. His whole life is one long Twelfth Night—if a Twelfth Night *can* be long.* Then what company he keeps! He is on visiting terms with the man in the moon—is hand and glove with Puck and Titania—plays at hide and seek with the stars—and is not afraid to join in a game at snap-dragon, or blind-man's buff, with the devil. To be sure he does love a bit of mischief to his heart; but then he never indulges the propensity at the expence of any but knaves and fools. Then he is an accomplished fellow withal. He knows all languages without the trouble of studying their grammars, and understands most sciences and arts, except botany and metaphysics—these he has no fancy for. He is a better architect than Mr. Soane—we have statues of his raising nearly as good as Mr. Bacon's—and he can hit off a whole length likeness with a stroke of his wand. As to dancing, he has a perfect passion for it, and knows all the new steps without being obliged to take 'private lessons.' He is a poet too, as good as most, though he never learned to write; which is perhaps an advantage to him, for he has no chance of being put into the Edinburgh Review. Certainly, if we were to change our humanity with any thing, it should be with harlequin; for he never grows older than twenty, and 'love's young dream' lasts all his life: at least so far as we are informed; for when he comes to be 'a married man' we lose sight of him, and neither know nor desire to know any more about him."

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* I have here, as I did in a former instance, given the original passage, as I find it in Blackwood's Magazine.—Tr.

The Columbine of the piece is not so characteristic a person as her party-coloured friend. She does little else but dance, love, and look pretty; which, indeed, considering that she is not allowed to open her lips during the whole time, is as much as can reasonably be expected of her. But the two Clowns are most extraordinary persons indeed, and must be looked upon as the *life* of the piece, as Harlequin is the *soul* of it. The discomforts and disasters that they meet with are endless; and the alacrity and good-humour with which they find expedients to help themselves out of their mishaps are no less so. They no sooner get into a scrape than they contrive some odd and unforeseen way of getting out of it; and they are no sooner out of it, than by some odd and unforeseen means they get into another. The posts and porters' loads that they run their heads against are numberless; the lives they lose and gain again are not to be counted; the times they are bit in two by crocodiles, or swallowed by whales, or run through with red-hot pokers, or shot from the mouths of cannons, are not to be told. They are persons of infinite awkwardness, and consequently are for ever making mistakes and blunders; but then they are persons of infinite address, and consequently their blunders are no sooner made than repaired. Then their bodily propensities are prodigious, and the capacities that answer to those propensities are fitting. They are amorous of every thing that wears a petticoat, provided it be old and ugly; they are gluttons of every eatable that comes in their way, provided it be unfit to eat; they'll drink you a horse-pond dry at a draught, provided the water be dirty enough! Then they are thieves, to a man; and their pockets are as capacious as their stomachs—refusing nothing and retaining every thing. You shall see one of them filch the whole contents of a larder, together with a proportionate provision of wine,-- which latter he pours into his pocket out of the bottles, to save room! But, for the attitudes into which they throw their persons and faces, nothing can be like it. If they have lost the common use of their limbs, and are moreover, like the rest of the party, dumb, they have discovered ten thousand other modes, both of walking and talking, never before thought of; for the former, they can use their hands, heads, shoulders, elbows, knees, backs, any thing but their feet; and in talking without the aid of the tongue, they are more eloquent than all the Abbé de L'Epée's pupils put together.

The Pantaloons in these pieces, who are always made either from the cruel father or the ridiculous lover, or both, are kept completely subservient to the rest of the characters. They are mere nonentities—pegs to hang tricks upon—butts to shoot jokes at. But though they have no wit or fun in themselves, they are of infinite use as the causes of wit and fun in other people. Like the dull and stupid boys at a great school, they make capital *fags*, and the games could not go on half so well without them.

Such are the *essential* characters in an English pantomime—the staple commodity of it. But in point of number, these are nothing compared with the infinite variety of persons who are brought into it from time to time, according to the scene which is going forward. Frequently the whole of the underlings of the theatre, the chorus-singers, figure-dancers, &c. are made use of three or four times over in the course of a good pantomime; many of them being made to appear in different characters, circumstances, &c. in every part of the known and unknown world, according as the fantastical will of Harlequin and his wand may choose to change the scene.

The only way in which I can enable you to gain a notion of the *detail* of these amusing extravaganzas (for they will of course not bear description) is by bidding you fancy the effect of the whole resources of a great national theatre, lavished (for so they actually are) on a production of this kind; where there is no limitation whatever on the score of extravagance, provided it be but in some way or other mixed up with drollery; where they have at their command, not only the whole world of what has been, or is, or may be, but the equally prolific one of what never was and never can be; and all this where they are allowed to suppose that the characters they have to deal with are possessed of every possible *im*possible attribute or quality that can or that cannot be conceived of; and above all, where they have the fear of the critic removed from before their eyes: for though all the world goes to see these entertainments, and consequently they are more productive than any others, they are got up avowedly and ostensibly for the children and holiday folks alone, and are therefore placed *hors de combat* in the war that is perpetually going on here, as with us, between dramatic authors and dramatic critics.

In fact, an English pantomime is incomparably the best thing I have met with here, that is *peculiar* to this country; and it might advantageously be transferred to our own stage, in exchange for the innumerable pieces that the English theatres borrow from ours, in the way of *petite comedie*, melo-drame, &c.

In my next I shall conclude what I have to tell you of the festivities connected with Christmas-time in this country.

V. S.

LETTER LX.

From Christmas-day to New Year's-day is called the holiday week. It is employed by the better sort of people in visiting at each other's houses; and the parties thus formed, though rather more mixed, are of much the same character as those I have described as taking place on Christmas-day itself: I mean that they are, generally speaking, much more free and unceremonious, and therefore more agreeable than those which take place at any other period of the year. There seems to prevail at all of them, a general feeling that it is "holiday-time," and that the gravity which is so wise and becoming at other times, may now be a little dispensed with, especially considering that there are generally some of the "young folks" present, and that on that account a little mirth may be not altogether unseasonable. Besides, I question whether it is possible even for English gravity to retain its wonted character, in the presence of gay, giddy, laughter-moving, laughter-loving childhood, without something like a feeling of the ridiculous coming over it.

With the lower orders this week is entirely devoted to amusement: that is to say, the best substitute for it which they can find; which is indeed little better than a round of coarse, idle, and objectless dissipation. Business is nearly at a stand; the workshops and manufactories are deserted; and the streets are thronged with knots of wretched-looking mechanics, of whom almost every alternate one you meet is in a state of intoxication. If I mention this (as I have over and over again observed it) with sorrow and indignation, it is not at the unhappy beings who are the immediate occasion of calling forth these feelings; for I had rather they should do even *this*, than stick to their work all the year round without intermission. It is at the wretched system that I am indignant, which does not provide better for their wants in this way, and which compels them to make dissipation their only amusement, instead of making amusement their only dissipation, as the same classes do with us.

But, as I before hinted, they *may* find a fit amusement at night; though it is when they are not much in a condition to enjoy it. I mean at the different theatres; the performances of which are arranged during the holiday-week with an express view to this class of visitors. Here, accordingly, they assemble in crowds; and a most strange and characteristic scene they present. The theatre is on these nights more like a bear-garden, than the scene of an intellectual entertainment. Of course during the greater part of the performance, silence is a necessary ingredient towards the understanding of what is going forward. But this they have no notion of; they come to see the pantomime, and till that makes its appearance they care little about any thing else that is presented to them; but prefer to amuse themselves by singing, whistling, shouting to each other, fighting (which an English assembly of this kind, whatever may be the occasion of it, can on no account dispense with) throwing oranges into the pit below, or dropping their hats and bonnets, for the pleasure of fishing them up again by means of twenty dirty pocket-handkerchiefs tied to each other, and let down for the dropped article to be fastened to; which is pulled up amidst the admiring shouts and hand-clappings of all who are not near enough to assist in the operation. I assure you this is no exaggeration. During the first two or three nights after Christmas-day, it is, for the first half hour, impossible to hear a single word that passes on the stage; and during the whole evening you cannot catch one word in ten—so completely is the whole house disturbed by what is going forward in the two galleries, where the class of persons of whom I speak for the most part assemble; the enormous prices of admission keeping them from any other part of the theatre. You are not to suppose that I complain of this, as it respects the disturbers themselves, or look upon it as an evidence of a more than ordinary degree of barbarism in *them*. On the contrary, I would have them on these occasions make ten times more noise than they do, and amuse themselves in any way they like best. They pay dear enough for the privilege of doing so, and are totally excluded from those parts of the theatre where they could see and hear if they would—which they cannot under any circumstances where they are. If they *could* see and hear, I'll answer *for* it we should find them silent and attentive enough; ten times more so than their betters are on ordinary nights. In fact, the barbarism is all confined to the said "betters." We mistake greatly in supposing that the lower orders are not capable of enjoying even a purely intellectual amusement, as well as the higher. I question whether they are not a great deal more so, strictly speaking: I believe that they have, upon the whole, as much sensibility to the developement of passion, as much tact in appreciating the delineation of character, as much intuitive judgment as to what is consistent and natural in each of these, as true a feeling for the extravagant and the ridiculous, and even as much imagination: and if so, they certainly *are* more likely duly to appreciate and enjoy such an entertainment as I am speaking of; since they certainly have, in addition to the above qualities, a much more simple and natural mode of looking at what comes before them, and are much less under the influence of those accidental feelings and associations which necessarily arise out of a highly-cultivated and artificial state of society.

New Year's-day—that most delightful day in all the French year—when folly and frivolity reign triumphant; when it is not only the pleasure but the duty of every one, man, woman, and child, to be a trifler, from four to fourscore;—that day for the revival of flagging friendships, the renewal of broken vows, the exchange of long-promised gifts; that day of kisses, compliments, and confectionery; that day, when no one, whatever may be his rank, from the *marchand de marons* to the prime minister, thinks of attending to his business,—no one save and except the maker of *bons-bons*—whose profits on that day enable him to make holiday for half the rest of the year:—In short, that day of all the year, which is, by universal consent, called *par-ex-*

cellence, THE day: I say this day is very little attended to in England, except as *one* of the days included in Christmas-time. It is, like Christmas-day, a *fête de famille*, the collateral branches collecting the party at *their* houses, as the head of the family had done on the previous day at theirs. It is, in fact, merely a repetition of Christmas-day; being enjoyed by nearly the same parties, in the same manner.

The last express holiday among the English during this "merry-making" period, (I use the English phrase, for we have no equivalent for it that is equally expressive,) is Twelfth-day; our *Jour des Rois*. And to confess a truth, it is kept in a pleasanter manner, and withal more worthy of *our* name for it, than it is with us. Perhaps the reason of this is, that here, even more exclusively than with us, it is devoted to the children; for I believe that, of all the pleasure we receive after a certain time of life, the most pure and unmingled, as well as the most vivid and permanent, is that which we receive *by reflection* from those we are interested in,—particularly when we ourselves are the proximate cause of that pleasure.

Twelfth-day in England (as they would say in Ireland) does not begin till night; but then the night is made, on this occasion, to begin several hours earlier than usual, in order that the young folks may not sit up too late: for an English parent is, I think, rather over-considerate in this respect: he will on no account suffer his child to purchase six hours of intense pleasure, at the expense of as many after hours of comparative lassitude and fatigue; he regards its health as the first good, and its happiness only as the second. It must on ordinary occasions be sent to bed at a certain hour, in an agony of tears, rather than be seen to look a little paler than usual in the morning, or be permitted to lie an hour or two later. This, no doubt, arises from kindly feelings; but I question whether it is the result of a wise calculation, at least considering the extent to which it is carried here. Indeed I think that, by judicious management, children may be *spoiled*, (as it is called) with great advantage to themselves and those who love them.

But let us attend to our English Twelfth-night. The young parties are assembled early in the evening; and the amusements usually commence with dancing. When this has proceeded for an hour or two, and various light refreshments have been handed round, different games are introduced, which are of such a nature as to admit of all the party joining in them,—such as forfeits, blind-man's buff, &c. If the English children are not so quick and clever as the French are, at bringing out the wit and drollery that these kind of sports are susceptible of, it cannot be denied that, when left to themselves, and free from all that restraint and *mauvaise honte* which are the bane of childhood, they enter into the fun with more avidity, and enjoy it more; and they are more boisterous, noisy, and mischievous accordingly. When they have been left to amuse themselves in this way for some time, a cold supper is generally served, in which the elder portion of the party join; and after that comes the grand object of the meeting—the celebration of that custom which formerly prevailed in so many other parts of Europe, but which has now fallen into almost entire disuse every where except here, and with us, and which is every where changed into a child's sport, instead of being, as it once was, a grand court ceremony. I mean the introduction of a great Twelfth-cake, and the drawing lots for the names and *characters* that are to be supported during the rest of the evening, and for the prize of cake, greater or smaller as it may happen, which is assigned to each ticket, according to its rank in the scale. It is the expectation of this moment that has been occupying every little heart present, not only during all the evening, but for days and weeks before; it is the vision of *this* that has been floating before their young imaginations during all the previous sports of the evening; and the eventful moment of putting their hands into the hat, to draw out the fated paper, is an era in their little lives. Silence is to be preserved during this drawing, and no one is to look at his ticket till all the rest are ready to look at theirs; then, at a given signal, each is to proclaim to the company the lot that has fallen to him, and is to be saluted by that title, and treated under that character, during the rest of the night. If this custom is not made the medium of so much mirth and entertainment as it might be, it at all events affords a very pleasant finish to the evening, and is frequently the occasion of calling forth very interesting developements of character, temper, talent, &c.

Nothing can be more interesting, in its way, than to watch, as I did the other evening, the different effects produced by the different characters thus drawn. No successful candidate for the suffrages of an elective monarchy was ever prouder of his title, or more perplexed how to support it, than the rosy, chubby-cheeked boy who drew the king on this occasion; and no newly-made queen, raised from a sheep-cote to a throne, was ever more conscious of deserving the dignity, or more careful to conceal that consciousness, than the little prim prudish-looking miss who was destined to be the queen of the evening, and who seemed to feel as entire a contempt for her royal consort as if *she* alone were of the legitimate stock and deserved the honour, while *he* had arrived at it through a mere mistake of fortune. To them, the shouts of surprise and laughter, that burst from the other part of the company on discovering their different fortunes, were matters of utter indifference or impertinence. What, in their notions of the matter, have kings and queens to do with laughter? The great piece of cake, too, which was now handed to them with all befitting ceremony, (which is not of common bread, as with us, and introduced merely for the sake of the *bean* that is hid in it, but is of the richest materials) was equally disregarded, as a matter beneath their consideration; the little boy, however, devouring it with his eyes and his fancy, while he disdained to touch it with his fingers; but the girl most unaffectedly despising it altogether, as a thing not to be thought of by persons in her elevated situation! Meanwhile, the rest of the party were as little occupied about their king-and-queen-ships, as these were about their subjects. Some were shouting forth rich peals of laughter, at the ridiculous figure that had fallen to them, and insisting on all the rest hearing the small wit of the two lines affixed to the picture; others were bridling up smilingly, and showing about their graceful and complimentary lot, as a matter not to be treated lightly; and two or three had evidently drawn characters which they were vexed with, and ashamed to shew,—perhaps, from the verse at the bottom reading them a lesson which their little consciences whispered into a reproof, touching some weak point in their tempers and dispositions, and therefore coming to them in the shape of any thing rather than a joke. This examining the different characters drawn, and the mirth arising out of it, occupy the time for an hour or so after supper; and then the evening is generally closed by another game peculiar to this time, which calls forth more laughter and merriment than any other part of the sports. This is called Snap-dragon. A large round earthen vessel is provided, half filled with raisins steeped in some spirit: this is placed on a circular table in the centre of the room—the fire is concealed—the room entirely darkened—and then the spirit is lighted; and the sport consists in watching the strange appearance communicated to all the faces by the blue livid light of the burning spirit, and in snatching out the plums that are steeped in it, and eating them while they are a-light. This over, the candles are re-lighted, and the little party retire to their homes,—not so fatigued with their evening's pleasure but they can talk it all over again as they go along in the coach, and dream of it all night long for a week to come.

Now, you must not be angry or disappointed, if, in reading these letters on the festivities of Christmas-time in England, you have found the details of them somewhat dull. If I had wished to shew you how pretty a letter I could write on such a theme, I should have adopted a different plan. But as this is a subject about which we know scarcely any thing in France, my object has been to tell you simply what I have learned about it, and to leave the application of it to yourselves. At all events the subject, I know, will be an agreeable one to you; for you are never so happy as when you are witnessing, contributing to, or even imagining, the happiness of others.

For myself, I can assure you that I have passed the Christmas very pleasantly—much more so than I ever expected to pass one away from V——. And what is still better, I have seen reason to in some degree alter my opinion of English society in general, and to believe that, with a little, (or perhaps I should say a good deal) less stiffness and formality, it might become very agreeable, when one acquires a tolerable familiarity with the usages of it,—from the perfectly hearty and generoùs hospitality that prevails in it, and the total want of that tone of pretended acquirement—that affected knowledge of every thing that can be known—which is the bane of mixed society in France.

V. S.

LETTER LXI

I PROPOSE to give you a short account of the periodical works of the present day in England; for they probably exhibit more talent and learning, and exercise a more decided and obvious influence on the existing taste and literature, than the same class of writings ever did before in any country. Indeed they seem to have produced within the last few years an entire revolution in the opinions and habits of the reading part of the community; and at present they hold those opinions and habits under their absolute subjection and controul.* The principal English Reviews can write an author into repute for a time, whatever may be his faults or deficiencies; and they can write one out of repute for a still greater length of time, whatever may be his merits. It must be confessed, too, that even the best of them do not scruple sometimes to exercise this power, in cases where certain of their interests and feelings are at variance with an impartial judgment. When the Edinburgh Review, which was chiefly instrumental in bringing about the change of which I have spoken, was first established, about seventeen years ago, it had the means, as well as the inclination, of exercising this power to a very formidable extent, for it was supported by writers of the first talent and learning in the country, and was conducted avowedly on *party* principles. The dangerous example and effect of this were soon discovered, and an equalization of the balance of critical power was created, by establishing another review on a similar plan, and supported by men of equal talent and learning with the former, but conducted avowedly on Tory, as the other was on Whig principles. This was creating a *kind* of balance, to be sure; but much such a one, in its comparative effects, as would be likely to result from having two estates in a monarchical government, instead of three, viz. the King, and the Peerage; forgetting the great body of the people. By the establishment of the Quarterly Review in opposition to the Edinburgh, the literary interests of the two great English parties, of Tory and Whig, are pretty safely protected; but in the mean time, those writers who happen to be of no political party at all, or who conscientiously oppose themselves equally to both parties *as such*, are, generally speaking, in the former case neglected, and in the latter ill-treated, by both ; unless, indeed, they happen to fall, for whatever reason, under the violent and particular displeasure of either one of these great literary tribunals. In that case, the other generally takes an opportunity of avenging the suffering party's cause, as the most effectual, and at the same time the least direct means of injuring the credit of its rival: for I cannot learn that they ever make a practice of noticing each other *directly*. In fact, to have been abused, whether justly or not, in one of these journals, is generally a passport to the favor of the other; provided the work in question is of sufficient importance to make it a subject of general attention.

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* I deprecate the displeasure of the two great literary tribunals the faults of which (as they seemed to the writer) are so incautiously named in this Letter. To say the truth, I was more than half tempted to suppress the obnoxious part of it altogether but as my system throughout the selection had been to publish the whole of a Letter, or none of it, I felt myself bound not to depart from the plan in this instance.—TR.

I have stated this in the outset of my remarks on this subject, (and I have perhaps stated it in rather too unqualified a manner) because it is the besetting, and perhaps the only fault of these two in other respects admirable works. The Edinburgh and Quarterly Reviews resemble, and stand nearly on a level with each other, in every respect;—in talent, learning, taste, spirit, and general impartiality,—as well as in their absolute devotion to a particular party. If they differ in any general manner, it is that the Edinburgh has more brilliancy than its younger rival, and the Quarterly more depth and solidity.

The cause of sound literature and correct taste has, no doubt, been infinitely benefitted by the respective exertions of these two works. Their general plans are exactly similar. They are of a mixed character,— comprising an analysis and review of recent works, and original essays on every possible subject that can be regarded as possessing a public interest. Their ostensible plan is indeed confined to the former of these objects; the latter is generally effected by placing the title merely of some recent work at the head of their proposed essay on the same subject, but confining their notice of the work to a few lines at the beginning or end of the article; occupying the rest with the writer's own views and opinions, and bringing his own knowledge to bear on the subject in question. Many of these essays, and particularly some of those which have appeared in the Quarterly, are considered as among the best pieces of writing of the kind in the English language. Indeed, several of them are known to have been contributed by the most distinguished writers and scholars of the day; and they have been given to the world anonymously, and through this medium, as not being judged by their authors of sufficient extent or importance to claim a separate and distinct publication. The analysis and review of books have also been, generally speaking, admirable in their way; in many instances, indeed, and particularly in the case of expensive voyages and travels superseding the desire or necessity of reading the original work at all. But the authors of works thus abridged, and as it were republished at a comparatively trifling price, are never found to complain; for the publicity and eclat their works gain by this means, are more than equivalent to any loss of purchasers they may sustain, among those who are content to take the abridgment for the whole. This, added to the extent and variety of information they convey on almost all subjects of public interest, make these two works the most amusing and seductive of the kind that can be conceived. And perhaps the term *seductive* may be applied to them in its least laudatory sense; for there can be little doubt that such reading as this, if much indulged in, (as it is at present in England to a most extravagant extent, judging by the demand for works of this kind,) is calculated, in most instances, to repress the inclination for severer studies, by begetting that *appearance* of acquirement, which is nine times out of ten the only object of such studies. The Edinburgh and Quarterly Reviews have certainly discovered, and opened to the

English public, something like a "Royal Road" to the possession of literary tastes, habits, and opinions.

I believe all the other English Reviews may, generally speaking, be said to be conducted on independent principles, as it regards politics. But I am told that every one of them is rendered more or less subservient to the personal views of a body of men who have lately become very important members of the republic of letters: I mean the booksellers. And this is not to be wondered at, nor perhaps to be lamented, when we consider that booksellers are the only patrons of literature in the present day in England, and that they are (as I have no hesitation in believing) the most useful and efficient ones that literature ever possessed. Say what we will about fame, distinction, and the like, there is no stimulus to continued exertion, either literary or otherwise, like a banker's cheque. Honor may be the spur that pricks the steed on, perhaps; but now-a-days profit is the steed itself, without the assistance of which the journey would never be undertaken at all, by half of those who at present engage in it, and would never be proceeded in to any good end by nine-tenths; and without this influence (which I have just referred to) in the hands of booksellers, they would probably be prevented from prosecuting those views which end so beneficially both for authors and readers: at all events they would be unable to prosecute them to the immense extent that they do now. So that whatever evil may be supposed to result from this influence, it may safely be considered as counterbalanced by the good.

Next in character to the Edinburgh and Quarterly Reviews, stand two others, of a similar size and price, and also published quarterly. These are called the British Review and the Retrospective. The British Review is similar in its plan and ostensible objects to its two great rivals; but it seems to be conducted on independent principles, and its sale and influence are, probably on that very account, trifling when compared with those of the Edinburgh and Quarterly. It is but fair to add, however, as an additional reason for this fact, that the British Review does not unite any thing like so great a body of talent and learning in its service. The Retrospective Review, is on an altogether different plan from the above-named—being devoted entirely to the descriptive and critical notice of the works of dead authors; such works, of the secondary and minor classes, as usually cease, after a certain period, to form part of the standard body of a nation's literature, and are consequently entirely unknown to the general body of readers; but which are, in many cases, well worth attention and remembrance. This is a very happy plan, and if but tolerably well executed (as I understand it is in the present instance) cannot fail of being extremely useful and interesting, in directing the choice of those who read chiefly for amusement and who would, without this help, perhaps be deterred from applying to the fountain head, and be content with the streams that are drawn from it at second hand.

It is unnecessary for me to describe to you at any length the other English Reviews, since the only difference between them and the Edinburgh and Quarterly, consists in the different degrees of talent with which they are conducted, and in their being devoted more exclusively to critical and analytical notices of the works they take up: though these also occasionally enter into general discussions on the subject before them, which they not unfrequently treat with considerable talent and learning. Of these Reviews, which are published monthly, there are several of a very respectable character. Among the principal are the "Monthly," the "British Critic," and the "Eclectic;" all of which are said to be occasionally assisted by some of the most respectable scholars of the day.

Besides the Reviews, which are devoted to the notice and criticism of the original works that appear from time to time, there has been opened to the reading part of the English community, within these few years, a vast fund of original writing, of every possible description, in the form of what are called Literary Magazines. As these works are on an entirely novel plan in most respects, and of an extremely interesting nature, and are also quite different from any thing that we ourselves at present possess, I shall give you a detailed account of one of them; taking as the subject of description that which is generally considered to be the best among them, and from which the others differ but little, except on the score of merit and external appearance.

The New Monthly Magazine did not exist at the time of my last visit to this country; at least under its present form and character. It has very lately been established, under the immediate management and direction of Mr. Campbell,—the accomplished poet and scholar whose works formed the subject of one of my late letters to you. However little genius they may have for invention, the English are certainly the best hands in the world at improvement. Give them an original idea to work upon, and they will make more of it, and push the developement of it nearer to perfection, than any other people in Europe. In point of plan, I scarcely think the New Monthly Magazine is susceptible of improvement; and in point of execution, it is certainly the most various, agreeable, useful, and comprehensive miscellany that has ever been offered to the public. It includes two distinct departments. The first, and most important and amusing of them, usually consists of from fifteen to twenty original essays; short, and for the most part light and gay in their character; probably written by as many different persons, and consequently in as many different styles; and nearly all arriving at a degree of excellence, till within these few years totally unknown to this kind of writing; and many possessing merit of the first class. In fact, some of the very best prose writers of the day in England, and her poets also, seem, from what I can learn on this subject, to take particular pleasure in now and then dissipating their minds on this kind of writing. It affords a scope and offers a temptation that cannot be resisted. They can do this when they can do nothing else. Two or three pages may be written on any text or subject, and in any mood of mind; and for this space any style may be borne—perhaps the more informal and extravagant, the better suited to the altogether desultory nature of the vehicle in which it is to appear, and the company it is to keep. Nothing can be more piquant and attractive than the melange formed by this infinite variety of style and matter. It makes readers where it does not find them; incipient readers it strengthens and confirms; and confirmed ones, or even those whose appetites are sated by over-indulgence, it rouses anew. Besides, you *must* read it, whether you will or no, unless you disclaim reading altogether. Not to have read such or such an article in the last New Monthly, said to be written by so and so, is an imputation not to be thought of; you might almost as well admit that you had not read the last Scotch Novel, or been to Paris.

The name of the favourite poet who conducts this work, and the distinguished reputation he enjoys for taste and judgment, as well as his talents as a prose writer, have given to it a character that was never before enjoyed by any similar work, and have ensured for it the assistance of persons of the very first rank in the literature of the day, both foreign and native. Among the former is the celebrated Sismondi.

The poetical contributions with which Mr. Campbell and his friends frequently enrich it, render it, in this department also, exceedingly attractive. His own poetry, in particular, is peculiarly valuable to the work; for there are few living poets about whom the English public seem to interest themselves so much as about Campbell, and there are none who reply to this curiosity and interest so little. He has written less than any other distinguished poet of the day; and has written nothing for several years, but what has appeared in the pages of this magazine. Among the other poetical contributors, M—— has mentioned to me the name of the delightful young writer who was the subject of the last of my letters on the English poets; and also those of two others who enjoy the most brilliant reputation of the day, as writers of comic verse. Each of these latter also furnish the magazine with prose papers on various subjects, written in styles quite peculiar to themselves; the one, delightful from its playful and elegant terseness, and the infinite gaiety and spirit with which it scatters about the sparkles of its exhaustless wit; and the other, irresistibly amusing, from the fund of fun, frolic, and extravagant drollery that it pours upon every thing it touches. These writers are brothers, and joint authors of the most successful *jeu d'esprit* of the day, in the shape of a satirical imitation of nearly all the popular poets of the present day in England; in which the peculiar style of each is adopted with such admirable tact and skill, that, but for the intentional exaggerations that are frequently introduced, for the purpose of giving a *comic* effect to the whole, the pieces might in many cases be mistaken for the productions of the writers whose names they bear.

The secondary department of this Magazine being of an entirely different nature from the first, is so arranged as to form a separate volume at the end of the year. This department is as rich in variety of information, as the other is of amusement. It contains, first, a digest of the Political events of the past month, both domestic and foreign. Then, an original and amusing account of the Dramatic novelties that have come before the public since the last publication; with a critical account of their merits, &c. This is followed by a similar account of the Fine Arts, with critical notices of all important works, objects, or exhibitions, in any way connected with them. The three foregoing subjects are treated of in original writing. Then follows, under the head of Varieties, foreign and domestic, every event of general interest that has come before the public in the course of the previous month, which is unconnected with either of the three preceding subjects; events and discoveries in natural history, philosophy, science, antiquarian research, literature, statistics, &c. These are succeeded by two other heads—Rural Economy, and Useful Arts,—in which all improvements in agriculture, gardening, domestic economy, &c. are noted down, and an account given of all patents granted for mechanical and other useful inventions. The matter under the foregoing heads is partly original, and partly collected from foreign and domestic journals.

Next comes a very useful and amusing department for general readers, consisting of a full list of all new publications during the previous month, accompanied by original critical remarks on such of them as seem to claim particular notice. This forms a kind of condensed review, which must be very useful to those who do not possess the means of seeing any other, and who yet wish to know what is going forward in the literary world.

The work is closed by an announcement of works in the press; a set of reports on various subjects of general interest, such as agriculture, commerce, meteorology, the money market, &c.; a list of the remarkable incidents of the month in the neighbourhood of the metropolis, including deaths, births, and marriages; a biographical obituary of remarkable persons; and finally, a list of occurrences in every county of England, and also in Ireland, Scotland, and Wales.

I have written you this detailed account of one of the English Literary Magazines of the present day, in order to give you an idea of the great perfection to which this people can carry a thing, when they indulge in their passion for improvement. Among ourselves, we could undoubtedly gain, every month, all the information corresponding to that which is here afforded, and as much amusement as that contained in the original department of the above named work; but we must go to twenty different sources for it: whereas here we draw it all from one, and that one confined within moderate limits, and easy of access. Of course the actual information gained from a work of this kind must be comparatively trifling and inefficient; but at all events it places a great choice before the enquiring mind, and is admirably adapted to rouse as well as direct its search, if it desires more than the merely superficial knowledge thus afforded.

There are several other monthly works of the above class, the names of which I need not mention to you, or enter into a detail of their respective plans, since they differ from the New Monthly Magazine chiefly in being less cleverly supplied in the original department, and less various and comprehensive in that which is chiefly compilation.

There are one or two, however, not greatly inferior, in either respect, to the above.

Thus far of the purely literary and miscellaneous periodical works of England. But you are not to suppose that her riches in this way end here. She has a host of others, devoted to the service of every possible department of Science, Art, &c. Philosophical Journals, Medical Journals, Journals of the Fine Arts, Sporting Journals, Political Journals, Religious Journals, orthodox and sectarian, and published at every possible interval,—annual, quarterly, monthly, weekly, daily, almost hourly—morning, noon and night. As far as I have yet been able to discover, they are "without number, numberless." I counted a few days ago, on the table of a Literary Institution to which M—— has introduced me, twenty-eight of the quarterly and monthly alone; and I believe this does not include near the half of what are published. Of the weekly and daily Journals I shall try to give you a short account in my next letter.

V. S.

LETTER LXII.

The English daily and weekly Newspapers make as conspicuous a figure in the periodical literature of the day, as the Reviews and Magazines do; and they differ as much from those of other nations—exercising as immediate an influence in their sphere, and finding as great a proportion of readers and purchasers. They are three or four times the size and price of ours, and contain a proportionate quantity of matter: and certainly whatever else may be their character and effect, they are most attractive and amusing inventions. I do not wonder at their number, and the extent of their sale; for nothing can be better adapted to pamper and encourage those factitious wants and desires that are created by the state of manners and society usually existing in great cities. They contain, not only all the real information that is from day to day springing up, relative to politics, literature, art, science, &c. both foreign and domestic; but all the reports and conjectures—all the imaginings and possibilities—that are for ever floating about in the atmosphere of society, on those subjects; added to all the truth, as well as all the falsehood, that can be by the utmost diligence invented and collected together, relative to every thing and to every body that can be supposed capable of exciting public curiosity,—from the intrigues of courts and the cabals of cabinets, down to the bon-mots and scandal of the Green-Room, and the tittle-tattle of the tea-table. The Morning Post may be supposed, like the late French Police, to keep a spy in its pay in every noble family in the kingdom, in the shape of a footman or lady's maid; though for less mischievous purposes, it is true;—for all their business is to collect and report such important facts as that my Lord A—— was observed the other evening to sit for a whole half-hour in conversation with the Hon. Miss B——; from which the said Post feels itself justified in announcing that "a matrimonial alliance is said to be on the tapis" between these two noble persons—and so forth.

But besides all this various and desultory kind of information, most of these publications contain really valuable and enlightened notices, on every event that is from time to time occurring in the political world; and the entire freedom of expression that exists here, gives a spirit and elasticity to this kind of discussion, no shadow of which is to be found elsewhere: for though America enjoys an equal degree of freedom in this respect, the writers she possesses are not as capable of turning it to advantage. These discussions are, it is true, in almost every instance coloured by party views and feelings; for without this it is doubtful whether any body could be found to read, much less purchase them—every Englishman belonging to some party or other, or thinking that he does, which amounts to the same thing. But this party colouring is almost always assumed, as a means of inviting the attention that could not otherwise be secured; and you frequently discover beneath it the most wise and liberal views on almost all subjects of general interest,—especially in cases where the immediate policy of the English government does not pledge it to any particular line of conduct or opinions. All this, no doubt, gives to the English newspapers a most extensive influence in various ways. But the most obvious external effect that they produce is on the taciturn habits, or nature, whichever it is, of Englishmen in general. In this respect they work a miracle similar to that of teaching the dumb to speak. If there were no Newspapers, it is probable that an Englishman, after the involuntary vivacity of youthful blood had subsided, would in time forget the use of his mother tongue; for he never talks on any subject but politics, and he knows nothing of that but what he learns from the Newspaper on which he has been brought up to pin his faith. As that writes, he talks, or rather tries to talk. If that has been eloquent, vehement, sarcastic, droll, or dull, in the morning, he tries to be so at night over his brandy and water; and if that has taken an opportunity of being silent, he gladly avails himself of the same privilege. Indeed nothing can be more true of him in this respect than what has lately been said of him, in a most un-English spirit to be sure, by one of his own writers: "He is silent because he has nothing to say, and he looks stupid because he is so."

I said also, in my last Letter, that the modern English Reviews have opened something like a "royal road" to the possession of literary tastes and acquirements. But the most extraordinary fact connected with the subject is, that you meet with scarcely any visible signs of this road being frequented, except the immense emoluments arising from the turnpikes that are placed upon it. The influence and effect of all these works are observable only on each of them, and on the general literature of the country. On the community at large, and its habits, feelings, and opinions, they produce no visible effect whatever.

Considering the enormous quantity of the above description of works published in London every month throughout the year, added to the still greater number of weekly and daily Newspapers, —all of which occasionally make literature and art subjects of their attention, and in many of which these are the most prominent features,—the general absence of even a superficial knowledge on these subjects, or an inclination to converse on them, is to me absolutely unaccountable. The Edinburgh and Quarterly Reviews are closely printed works, comprising about three hundred pages, and are published four times every year; and the sale of each of these alone is said to be not less than twelve thousand every time of publication.

This is exclusive of the vast number of other works of a similar nature, and the still greater number of magazines, weekly literary works, &c. of which I have spoken in my last; and all of which find a sufficient sale to enable them to employ men of more or less talent and learning in the getting of them up. And yet, as I have hinted in my remarks on the English character, literature and art may be considered as almost proscribed subjects, in what is called mixed society; and there is scarcely any other society to be met with in London.

I do not mean to deny that a vast number of what may be called the inhabitants of London employ a great portion of their leisure time in reading; and that this class of persons do occasionally meet together and converse on literary subjects. But they are generally considered as a class by themselves, and are looked upon as rather out of their place in what is called here *mixed company*. They, for the most part, belong to the middle rank of life, and consist of persons of domestic and retired habits, who do not reside in the metropolis, but come to it probably every morning to transact their commercial concerns, and return to their families in the afternoon, a few miles in the country. What I speak of as extraordinary (and the fact appears to me as singular an anomaly as any thing of the kind I ever met with) is, that this unprecedented diffusion of literature, and that of the most popular and attractive kind, should fail to create any thing like a general fashion for it.

What is it causes the immense call for all this information and discussion? And what becomes of it all, when, in answer to that call, its periodical floods are given forth? Or are those floods like certain rivers, which, after arriving at a given point, sink into the earth and disappear,—combining their stagnant and polluted waters with the unprofitable soil, and forming bogs and marshes that put forth nothing but pestilential vapours, and lights that lead astray? Perhaps there is an absorbent power in an Englishman's mind similar to that which his body seems to possess; for I have repeatedly seen them pour down their throats glass after glass of that, which, taken in half the quantities, would have made you or I mad; and the only effect it seemed to produce was to make them even more silent, serious, and wrapt up in themselves, than they were before; except that at intervals it has seemed to inspire them with courage to put forth short bursts of rudeness and ill-temper, which the usages of society would otherwise have had the power to suppress; or to let escape feelings or secrets relative to their own family affairs, which interest or common sense would at other times have induced them to conceal. This regular periodical appearance and dis-appearance of such vast funds of literary matter, without its producing any tangible or visible effect, is a very curious subject for consideration; and perhaps it may occupy more of my attention hereafter.

V. S.

LETTER LXIII.

I AM afraid, my dear L——, my promised sketch of the state of education in England will turn out to be a very meagre and unsatisfactory one. But I find the subject is of so extensive a nature, that to make it at all complete would have been quite a serious undertaking. I must have gone into enquiries which, even if I could have mustered up industry to have made them, would have demanded more time than I can possibly spare at present. I must, therefore, send you a mere outline now; begging you to wait till I return for the details that should fill it up; when I shall bring with me such books and other documents as will, I hope, enable us together to gain a pretty correct view of the subject.

In England the spirit of emulation, or of money-getting—whichever you please to call it—leads to the over-doing of every thing; and in nothing is this more conspicuous than in the innumerable establishments for the education of youth, up to a certain point of acquirement. When a father, in a respectable class of life, has made up his mind to send his boy to school, it must be a source of the most painful perplexity to determine where he shall send him; the choice of schools being so great, and the comparative merits of each so extremely difficult to be ascertained. The system pursued at each—if it can be called a system—is, generally speaking, entirely different from that of all the others; and it is at all of them a purely arbitrary matter, depending on the caprice, the interest, or the ignorance of the different masters. And these consist—I believe I may say for the most part—of mere adventurers and speculators, who have been frustrated in other views of advancement in life, and have adopted this as a *dernier resort*: for here, when a man who has had a decent education in his youth, but who has been long enough in active life to forget it all, finds himself, from whatever causes, unable to succeed in any other mode of procuring a subsistence, he sets up a school. I am now speaking of those elementary establishments which are intended to advance children to a certain point in common school attainments; and at the same time to attend to the formation of their manners and moral habits: for, at the systematic public schools, which are intended to prepare boys for a regular classical education, these latter considerations are not professed to be attended to. And, indeed, to send a child at once from the indulgences of home, to the strictnesses of a school of this kind—of which there are many excellent ones in England—is to blot out at once the brightest years of his life. Besides, nothing is taught at these schools but those elements which are necessary to prepare the child for what is to follow; whereas, at the other schools to which I have alluded above, a child may be taught any thing, or nothing, just as his parents please to direct. It is another great evil, that the degrees of expence incurred in sending a child to these miscellaneous schools, are as various as the degrees of advantage to be gained at them; but, unluckily, one can seldom be taken as a criterion of the other. A father may send one of his boys to a school where the year's charges will be defrayed for thirty pounds, and another to one where they will reach to a hundred and fifty pounds; and at the end of the year the two boys may come home equally well instructed,—the charges for that instruction never being reckoned according to the time and talents employed in it, but according to the profit expected to be derived. Instruction, like every thing else here, is looked upon as a commercial commodity, in the hands of the people, and to be applied as such. It is, of course, easier to procure scholars at twenty pounds a-year than at a hundred pounds; if, therefore, as much profit can be made by a hundred scholars at twenty pounds a-year as by twenty at a hundred, and the nature of the party's connexions is such that he can procure the hundred more readily than he can the twenty, this latter plan will be adopted. In fact, the only *system* that prevails at common English boarding-schools, is one of universal quackery, with a view to money-getting; and the only *advantage* a boy gains during these six or seven best years of all his life is, that, when he does come into the world, he is better able to struggle through it than if he had passed those years in mere enjoyment, because he has learned to be more suspicious, selfish, cunning, cautious, and deceitful, than he would otherwise have been! But, in exchange for this "advantage," he makes a blank sacrifice of that period during which alone he retains the *instinct* of happiness, and may truly be said to enjoy his life, provided he passes it under circumstances not un-adapted to his existing wants and feelings.

As to any thing that is gained at these schools in the shape of acquirement, it is literally worse than nothing. I have never seen an English boy of eleven or twelve years of age, of however respectable parents, who could speak his own language with common grammatical propriety; which would scarcely have happened if he had passed his time at home. And I have met with many who have learned French for seven years (for every body *learns* French here) who, so far from being able to hold a conversation in that language, could with difficulty be made to answer the simplest question intelligibly. In the same number of years they generally learn about as much of Latin; and are nearly as good proficients in writing, and the common elements of arithmetic, as they might be made in half the number of months at home.

I believe nearly the same may be said of the schools for females; but in these the system is still worse; because girls do not need the same initiation into the mysteries of after life that boys do; and yet at these schools they gain this to a still more mischievous extent. In the way of acquirement they are about on a comparative level. If they learn a little more French and Italian than boys do, it is merely because females have naturally a greater aptitude to acquire languages; but as to any other of their school attainments, if their parents hope or expect them to fulfil any of the best purposes of their life, either as it regards themselves or others, they generally have the sense to unteach them all these as speedily as they can when they return home.

Besides the common boarding-schools to which the above remarks are intended to apply, there are some others in the same class, though of a very different kind. But these are so few, that they only form exceptions to the general rule. Those to which I am now alluding are kept by persons whose talents, education, and principles well fit them for so important and responsible an undertaking; and accordingly they are conducted on a system adapted to effect all the good of which establishments of this kind are capable, and to avoid as many as possible of the evils to which they are liable. But perhaps it is not wonderful that there should be so few of these, considering the great trouble and difficulty attending them, and the little comparative return in the shape of either credit or emolument. I don't know who, that could gain an honourable subsistence in any other way, would undergo the labour and anxiety that must belong to an undertaking of this kind, unless he could get rid of all scruples as to the manner of fulfilling the duties arising out of it.

Next above these miscellaneous boarding-schools —for you will see that I have begun at the bottom—

next above these are the public grammar-schools, which are intended to prepare boys for receiving a regular university education. I believe, as far as respects this professed object, these schools are conducted on a better system, and they fulfil their purposes more effectually, than any others of the kind in any country. The origin of most of them seems to date from a very distant period, when certain property has been given by individuals, either by will or otherwise, in order to form an endowment, which is to provide for the gratuitous board and education of a certain number of scholars for ever. Each of these establishments seems to have been a kind of *nucleus*, round which a more extensive one has formed itself,—without, however, infringing on the views and intentions of the original founder; because all those scholars who are not on "the foundation," as it is called, pay for their education, and the additional emolument thus arising enables the persons who administer the affairs of the charity—for such in fact it is—to employ masters better qualified for the task, and make such other arrangements, as the original funds would not permit. There are several of these schools situated in London, and in different parts of the country, and they vary in the different points to which they carry the scholar's acquirements, according to what can be afforded by their respective endowments. But several of them send out their scholars with nearly as solid and extensive attainments as they would gain at the universities; so that the younger branches of many of the first families in the kingdom are allowed to complete their education at these schools, without attending the universities at all; for this is not indispensable unless they are intended for the church—in which case they are compelled to remain a certain time, and take certain degrees, at one or other of these national establishments.* Among the most celebrated of these grammar-schools, are those of St. Paul's, Westminster, and the Charter-House, in London, and those of Rugby, Harrow, Winchester, and Eton; which last is the most celebrated of any, and the most magnificently endowed. Some of the most distinguished public characters of the day in England received their education at this school.

V. S.

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* The writer has been misinformed on this point. It is usual, but not indispensable.—Tr.

LETTER LXIV.

THE English Universities are, without doubt, the most extensive, magnificent, and at the same time effective establishments of the kind, that any country in the world can, or ever could, boast. In whatever point of view these celebrated seats of learning are considered,—whether as to the richness of their endowments, the romantic beauty of their several localities, the rarity and value of their bibliographical stores, the splendour and variety of their architectural ornaments, or the genius and immortal fame of the poets, philosophers, statesmen and scholars they have sent forth to the world, —I suppose no other similar establishments can be brought into comparison with them. With reference to their proposed ends, perhaps the English universities are now as perfect human institutions as the world is ever likely to see. I say that they are so *now;* for the system of education adopted at them has been revised within these few years, and several very obvious abuses have been abolished, and improvements introduced; particularly at Oxford, which is the most celebrated of the two. Formerly there was little difficulty in entering a youth at Oxford, provided you chose to incur the expence; but now no one is admitted whose previous acquirements in the learned languages up to a certain point, will not bear the strictest investigation. Until lately, too, the formal examination of scholars, previous to their being allowed to take certain degrees, was so much a matter of routine, that a few weeks' preparation would enable a candidate to pass through them with tolerable credit, whether he possessed the supposed acquirements or not. But now, nothing short of the real solid acquirements themselves will give him any chance of passing through his examinations at all. So that now, though a student may, when once he has entered himself at the University, do as he pleases about pursuing his studies any farther,—yet, if he aspires to any of the honours or advancements it offers, he knows that nothing but real desert can, under any circumstances, gain them for him.

Before concluding this subject, I must not omit to mention what is perhaps the most important, and certainly the most characteristic feature connected with education in England. I mean the manner in which the children of the poor are instructed at the public expence. I suppose there is not a parish throughout the country, in which there is not one or more schools supported by voluntary contributions, at which the lower classes are instructed gratuitously in those common rudiments which are the foundation of all acquirement, and which are alone sufficient to enable talent to develope itself where it really exists, but without the aid of which it is almost certain to lie dormant for a time, and at length to become extinct. These schools are of various kinds, and are conducted on various principles; but within the last few years a vast number have been organized on the celebrated Madras system; and the extraordinary facilities this system affords, has had the effect of increasing this gratuitous education to such an extent, that it may now be considered as almost universal in England. A plan has also been adopted at most of these new schools, which is calculated to have a most beneficial general effect, on both parents and children. Instead of teaching the children literally without any charge, the parents are required to pay a weekly stipend, which is so very small as not to be missed, or to deter the poorest from sending their child, and yet which excites, both in parent and child, a feeling of something like independence, and a kind of claim for what they receive; which feeling it is of the greatest importance not to extinguish. At these schools, too, the children are not required to wear a particular badge, or livery, as they are at the common parish schools; which is another great improvement of the same nature, and tending to the same end, with that which I have just mentioned.

Besides these schools there are others called Sunday schools, from their being opened only on that day. All the other free schools require large annual contributions for their support, on account of the expence of buildings, masters, &c.; but the plan of these schools admits of their being carried on without any expence whatever. They are always established in a district where there already exists one of these parish or other free schools; and these latter not being open on a Sunday, the conductors of the Sunday school obtain leave to use the school-house for their purposes during the day; and the children are instructed by persons of respectability in the neighbourhood, who attend the school-house gratuitously for that purpose. Whether these Sunday schools deserve the encouragement they receive in this country, and whether the plan, of substituting instruction and confinement for the freedom and recreation which every where else accompany the seventh day of the week, is a valuable one, is what I shall not inquire into. But it seems to me that, as far as regards the persons who support and take a part in the labour arising out of this plan, more pure and unaffected benevolence is evinced than in any other of the charitable institutions which are the boast of England.

V. S.

LETTER LXV.

I HAVE been to see the boasted view from Richmond Hill; and I am quite disappointed with it. But perhaps this is my own fault; for I had (I don't very well know why) taken up a notion that it was a combination of every possible kind of beauty in landscape; and I find it consists of but one single kind. It has an elegant and perfectly classical air, which is peculiar to itself, and is very striking in its way; but it is not at all adapted to this climate, and, moreover, wants all the beauties that the association of ideas gives to external scenery. You stand on the top of a natural terrace, planted with stately elms, which form a kind of frame-work to the picture, and through these you look down on numerous swelling masses of foliage, rising immediately beneath you, and stretching out interminably into the distance in all directions. From one mass of this foliage, on the right, the river seems to rise as if from a subterranean source, and lapsing along gently up the middle of the scene, loses itself again abruptly before the termination of what forms the fore-ground, and seems to sink into the earth as it seemed to rise from it. The banks of the river consist of a bright green turf, continuing to the water's edge, and not having the slightest perceptible rise above the level of the water itself. This gives a quiet effect, perfectly consonant with the rest of the scene; but the causes of it are exactly those which prevent that scene from being so picturesque and attractive as otherwise wouuld be. In fact, the whole ground-work of the principal or front part of this view is a perfect flat; and excepting on the immediate borders of the river, where the green turf peeps' out every now and then in bright smooth patches, it is one continued mass of foliage; laid out, it is true, in a perfectly natural manner, and without the slightest appearance of regular planting, and therefore rising into various heights, presenting various characters, and running into various clumps, divisions, colours, &c.—but still with scarcely any relief from the intermixture of champaign country, open spaces, with cattle, roads, mills, village spires, country seats, or any thing else that can indicate the presence of animated life. Even where you do discover the traces of habitations, either by the smoke from their chimnies, or by small portions of their architecture, they always proceed from the midst of thick foliage, and seem buried beneath it. Under an Italian sky this shaded and embowered character, continued even all through an extensive view like this, would, by association merely, produce a charming effect; but here, where the difficulty is to catch a glimpse of sunshine, not to escape from it, the effect of a superabundance of foliage in a view is not good. Clumps of it at intervals, with patches of meadow or cultivated land between,—as they occur in English scenery more gracefully blended than in any other,—always produce a delightful effect; like the variegated beauty of a blue sky, with patches of cloud of various forms, colour, and character, scattered all over it. But here it is like almost all cloud; which gives much too sombre a hue to the scene. It is the same with the three or four distances that complete this rich and certainly harmonious picture. They recede and soften off behind each other in a most exquisite manner, till you can scarcely distinguish the last blue distance from the sky or clouds, with which it seems to blend: but still it is almost all foliage. This, while it gives a unity of effect, and at the same time an air of deep contemplative beauty, of elegant and voluptuous repose, to the whole, does not constitute exactly the kind of view one likes best to look on immediately after leaving a great city. The contrast is too abrupt. These scenes, and the associations they call up, are each a libel on the other. There can be no sympathy between them, or between the persons who can be satisfied with each of them. There is no shading off, or melting into each other. One or other of them must be an impertinence; and we perplex ourselves to know which, till we become dissatisfied with both. Even the river, which constitutes the chief beauty of the scene, does not give a character of animation to it. It does not seem to flow along, but to lie still in the midst—like a clear smooth mirror, in which the trees, the clouds, and the sky are invited to look at and admire themselves, and the softened images of each other.

Higher up the hill, on the side of which the terrace is situated, you enter the Royal Park. This is a most delightful spot, extending all over the top of the hill, and down the sides of it; and here I think the views are much finer and more interesting than the more celebrated one from the terrace; for here you have always a considerable space of fore-ground stretching out immediately from the spot on which you stand; and without this no view can be perfect. In looking at any view that can only be seen from an abrupt height, you feel an unpleasant effect of distance and loneliness; and the view itself also receives, from its isolation, a character of artificialness, which reminds you of a picture; and this should never be the case. The perfection of a picture consists in its giving you the ideas and feelings arising from a real landscape; but a landscape ought never to suggest the idea of a picture.

The town of Richmond is one of the most pleasing and characteristic I have seen. It is purely English; and nothing like it could be found in any other country. There is an air of exact propriety about every part of it, that is quite peculiar to England. But Richmond, and its immediate vicinity, is a very favourite spot among those families of distinction who make London their residence during a great part of the year; and there is evidently great pains taken to render it as attractive as possible. Richmond has frequently been compared to Versailles; but I am not able to guess why; for there is no one point of resemblance between them, except that they are both about twelve miles from the capital.

We went to Richmond by the Steam-boat; and I have scarcely yet recovered from the effects of the journey. You know I hated this self-willed machine, when first I saw it hurrying and clattering along, between the wharfs and coal-barges, and through the muddy water, at Blackfriars' Bridge; but now I have not common patience with it. It is, to be sure, a most atrocious invention, and fit for nothing but to transport convicts to Botany Bay, or condemned souls across the Styx. To see a huge, noisy monstrosity like this, breathing fire and smoke, come insolently trundling itself *up* the clear stream, beneath the willows and alders, and between the classical banks of Pope's Twickenham, and treating all one's feelings, fancies and associations,—past, present, and to come,—with contempt, is intolerable, and ought to be forbidden by Act of Parliament. But really they have no notion of these kind of sensations here. The women in particular, seem to enjoy the ride—or whatever else it ought to be called—beyond measure. I dare say they think it mighty clever to be able to set nature and custom at defiance in this way. It partakes of the spirit of contradiction, and they sympathise with it. The steam-boat will have its own way, and that's what they like to encourage.—You are by this time quite satisfied that I have, as I hinted above, not yet recovered from the effects of this journey. The truth is, it made my head and even my bones ache again, and put me quite out of temper, for it jolts worse than a French diligence over the pavé, and roars like a corn mill; and instead of being able to look at the scenery along the banks of the river, which I so much wished for an opportunity of seeing, all I could do was to sit perversely counting the abominable strokes of the steam-engine, as they jarred and vibrated on every nerve about me. But really the bodily inconvenience attending a voyage in this new "infernal machine" is nothing compared with its insolent violation of all one's most cherished notions of keeping and consistency. Think of a drunken Dutch boor in the midst of one of Claude's *reposos;* or imagine a great rough cloven-footed Satyr in Titian's Bath of Diana; or conceive a herd of Porpoises tumbling about in one of the Italian lakes; and you may gain some idea of the effect of seeing a London steam-boat intruding itself upon the Thames at Twickenham.

V. S.

LETTER LXVI.

I HAVE lately been staying for a few days at a little suburban village called Hampstead, a summer sojourn, which is in great favour with the *citizens* of London, and which is, consequently, held in infinite contempt by all those among their betters who have—never seen it:—I must give these "betters," whoever they may be, this excuse for thinking slightingly of so delightful a spot. Perhaps there is no great metropolis more rich in the various beauty of its surrounding scenery than London. The town itself, and its immediate suburbs, occupy an immense plain; but this plain is everywhere surrounded by what, in a mountainous country, would be regarded as mere clumps and risings, but which must here take the name of hills. Hampstead is situated on one of these; and I think it presents a greater variety in landscape beauty than I have anywhere else seen in the same space: and all this variety is perfectly characteristic, and could belong to none but English scenery. The most striking parts of this scenery, though not I think the most attractive merely as views, are two sister vales, which sink into the summit of the hill, and are divided from each other by the public road, which runs between them in the form of a lofty causeway. In these delightful little vallies we have an example of that genial power which Nature possesses, in common with Shakspeare's lovely Ophelia, of turning every thing—even what might seem likely to be a source of unmixed mischief and annoyance—"to favour and to prettiness." The soil of these vales consists entirely of a red and yellow sand, which is not to be found anywhere else in the neighbourhood of London, and which is used there for various purposes; regardless, therefore, of the effect that may be produced by it on these beautiful little retreats, (so truly among the necessaries of life to the inhabitants of a great city) any one who pleases is allowed to come here and dig for this sand, and carry it away in any quantity, provided he pays a certain charge to the Lord of the Manor. It might be expected that this perpetually turning up of the soil, and leaving it to take any form that accident may give it, would be likely to throw a character of rudeness and disorder over the spot, not at all in keeping with the air of completeness and finish that always pervades English domestic scenery. But exactly the reverse is the case.

These perpetually recurring patches of bright yellow and red, intermixed with the different greens of the turf, heath, furze, &c. that grow in great abundance on this kind of soil, give a liveliness to the scene that it would not have under any other circumstances, and also give it a different aspect at every point from which you look at it.

But the peculiar character belonging to the scenery about this village, and from which it derives its chief beauty, is the universal undulation in the surface of the soil. There is not a single level spot to be found so large as the Place Vendome; so that, whichever way you look, the different surfaces everywhere rise or dip into each other, and create a change of distance, and a novelty of effect, at every ten steps. Speaking of the scenery in itself, it does not present much variety; for it almost all consists of little miniature meadows, surrounded by beautiful hedge-rows, and planted irregularly with various kinds of forest trees. But this undulation in the surface of the ground causes a perpetual interchange between the different objects as they are situated with respect to each other, which prevents the view from ever becoming monotonous, or indeed from ever appearing the same from any two points, however short their distance from each other. The beauty of this kind of scenery, at least for those who live in the midst of it, is that it never tires or ceases to be interesting, because you can never get thoroughly acquainted with it, so as to know it by heart, or be able to recal it to the memory when it is not before you. Whenever you go to visit it, it always receives you with a smiling, but always with a new face; which latter quality is, I am inclined to think, a very great merit in inanimate objects, whatever it may be in friends and acquaintance.

But, besides this particular description of scenery, Hampstead is not wanting in views of a different kind; such as are usually to be seen from the top of eminences. From a terrace at the back of the town, you have one of these views in great perfection,—where wood, water, pastures, corn fields, villages, farms, mills, single dwellings of different kinds, &c. are spread out before you under an endless variety of forms, colours, and aspects; the whole indistinctly bounded by aërial hills floating and undulating in the distance, and relieved by a broken and irregular fóre-ground of rich emerald green pasture, planted with clumps of lofty trees growing into *families*, and enlivened by cattle of every kind feeding, and in the midst of which rises a little green hill, with an irregular dwelling on it, which intercepts the whole centre of the view, and divides it, except the remote distance, into two. This view also, like that from Richmond Hill, gains considerably in effect by being seen through a frame-work of lofty trees.

V. S.

LETTER LXVII.

I AM just returned from spending a week with M—— at Oxford, the principal of the English Universities; and as I have never been more delighted than with the scenery both natural and artificial, that I have met with here, I invite you to pass a day with me in exploring some of its beauties. These are so numerous, however, that I must introduce you only to the most choice among them—such as may be seen within the compass of a long summer's day; for, if I were to describe them all, I should write you a volume instead of a letter.

In order that we may see Oxford to the best advantage, and not let one part of it interfere to lessen the effect of the other, we will contrive to reach it after dark over-night, and will retire to our nests immediately, that we may be able to leave them not long after the lark leaves his; and on sallying forth, we will, if you please, not look either around or behind us, till we reach a little elevation on the Henley road, to the east of the city.

How delicious is this prime of the morning! It is to a summer's day what the spring is to the year, or childhood to human life. The dew hangs, like a blessing, on the glittering leaves; and the mists are rising from the grass, like the smoke of an acceptable sacrifice, steaming up to the heavens. Hark to those heifers cropping the crisp herbage. I know of no sound more purely pastoral; it is as refreshing to an ear sick of the talk of towns, as a draught of ice-cold water to a parched palate, and how sweetly it meets and harmonises with the rich melody that comes raining down from yonder mounting lark! There are no other sounds stirring;—for the sun has not yet awakened the breezes—the bee is still wrapped in its honey-heavy slumbers—and the "hum of men" is a thing of memory only.

Turn we now to the most beautiful view of its kind in existence. At the extreme left and right, but not extending far into the distance, lie cultivated lands, laid out in small fields surrounded by hedge-rows, and undulating into hill and dale, in a manner peculiar to English scenery. In the immediate front these fields take the form of a rich plain, through which wind the two roads from London, till they join and lose themselves in the city. And then (at a distance of about half a mile from where we stand) rises the lovely city itself—steeped in the stillness of the morning, and crowned with the beauty of the clouds that hang suspended over it, leaving an interval of grey sky between. Follow with your eye the road which runs at our right hand, till it reaches the bridge at the entrance of the city. Here rises the solemn and stately tower of Magdalen College—everywhere a conspicuous ornament in the general view, but here its principal individual feature. Immediately to the right of this tower stands the grove of the same college,—bearing from this point of view the appearance of a uniform mass of verdure, rising like a living wall, to shut out all the external world, its idle pleasures and senseless cares. Immediately to the left of this college an open space presents itself, confusedly peopled with spires and towers, which, retiring behind each other, do not satisfy the imagination, but lead it into the heart of the city, as it were through an open portal cut through a wall of trees. The most conspicuous objects in this part of the view are the two sister towers of All Souls, and the knotted pinnacles of the Schools. Finally, still farther to the left, and exactly matching to the groves of Maudlin on the right, rises a similar, but more rich and extensive mass of trees; and from the midst of this lofty mass look forth, in a line, six buildings of various construction, all beautiful in their kind, and all totally different from and contrasting with each other. First on the left stands the rich mosque-like tower of Christ's Church gateway, and by its side the plain sober spire of the Cathedral; next comes the light, airy, and elegant spire of All Saints Church, which is finely contrasted to the low venerable old knotted pinnacles of Merton, which stand next to it; then rises, in unrivalled loveliness, the sweetest of all spires—that of Saint Mary's Church; and by its side, clothed in a solemn gravity, the dome of the Radcliffe Library. To those who are not acquainted with the objects which make up this scene of unparalleled beauty, and who see it for the first time, I should conceive it must bear the semblance of a fairy vision, rather than of a real tangible scene, chiefly raised by human hands—so abstracted and poetical an air does it carry with it. I speak now of this particular portion of the view before us, where the above-mentioned six objects seem to rise out of that solid mass of verdure formed by the magnificent elm grove belonging to Christ Church College. To me this part of the view immediately suggested the vision of that enchanted city we read of in fairy lore, which the remorseless ocean had swallowed up; but, touched by the beauty of a few of her spires, pinnacles, and domes, had left *them* uncovered, peering above its green waters. But we must quit this enchanting, if not enchanted scene, or we shall lose the sweet stroll I propose to take before breakfast, through the Water-walk of Magdalen. Proceed we, then, to cross the elegant modern bridge over the Cherwell, (which we have no time to admire as it deserves) delaying a moment, however, in the centre of it, to notice the charming views formed by the emerald meadows on each side;—on the left, stretching away into the distance, and bounded at the end by richly-wooded rising ground, and at the sides by the gardens of a modern mansion, the fine ivy-bound walls of the botanic garden, &c.; and on the right by a light eminence crowned with an Italian villa, and the stately elms of Maudlin, affording, between their massy stems, glimpses of that almost sacred grove which we are about to explore: the river winding about in graceful negligence through both the scenes, and giving to them a life and motion which nothing else can.

Before passing from this spot, let us not neglect to pay due honour to the stately beauty of the front which Maudlin here presents to the public way. Nothing can be more pure, chaste, and noble in its detail as well as in its general effect. Here she stands, to greet and usher in our first footsteps to this magnificent city—an earnest and a foretaste of what we are to meet with as we proceed. Time, you see, has steeped her all over in the warm glow of maturity, but without adding a single touch or hint of decay. The lichens that everywhere cling about her are not grey, but yellow—like the sun-freckles on the face of a matronly beauty. As a single whole—an object to be looked at by itself, and at once—I think this tower and front of Maudlin is among the very finest things we shall see; and the view altogether, from this spot, is most rich and enchanting, but of a more *modern* character than any other that we shall meet with here.

To convey, by description, anything like the effect produced by wandering in what is called the Water-walk belonging to Magdalen College, (passing into its rich shades, from the city, during the glow of a brilliant summer's day) is more than I shall attempt; but the heart and mind, in whatever state they may have previously been, which are not subdued by it to a condition of calm, contemplative peace, "that passeth all understanding," may be pitied indeed,—for they are past the influence of all external things. This walk is entirely artificial, and is formed round a rich meadow, which is insulated by a branch of the Cherwell; so that its whole course is by the side of a clear stream.

On first entering it from the court of the new buildings, and turning to the left, we find ourselves in an embowered shade, completely closed in by shrubs of various kinds on each side, with the higher forest-trees shooting up from among them at intervals, and forming arch above arch overhead. On the right side of the walk, for some distance, the screen thus formed is almost impervious, except to the broken patches of sunshine which fall on the footpath; but on the left little openings are made, which, as you proceed, afford glimpses into a small park or grove, also belonging to this college, planted with noble elms, and stocked with deer. For some distance this walk winds so continually, that you are not able at any point to see before you for twenty-yards. Presently, however, the arch above grows somewhat higher, and you arrive at an opening, through which is seen a water-mill at work, the wheel of which is entirely covered and hid by an elegant weeping willow, so as to give the effect of a water-fall. This is an exquisite object, no doubt; but, to say the truth, though the mill is a *real* one, the whole picture (for it looks like one) has rather too much the appearance of a scene on the stage—so prettily has every thing about it been contrived to aid and mingle with the general effect. At this point the river makes an angle, and the walk, following it, takes the form of a straight line for a considerable distance; so that, on turning the angle, you look along a low and apparently interminable arch of green: the footway being a firm red gravel, fringed on each side with smooth-shaven turf. This, though very pretty as a variety, is not my favourite part of the walk. Proceed we therefore at once to the end of this vista, and, turning another angle, we shall find ourselves in a part of the walk that suddenly widens, and affords a passage through a double line of lofty elms, the interstices between which are, on the left, filled up with shrubs, but on the right they are open, offering a rich view of different parts of all the buildings belonging to this magnificent endowment: tower, chapel, hall, all " bosomed high in tufted trees." At proper intervals of the walk there are seats; at the end next the public road there is a fine view of the bridge and the open country; and to complete the effect of the whole, beautiful cattle of different kinds (they almost seem to have been *selected* for their beauty) are constantly feeding in the meadow round which the walk runs.

Undoubtedly this walk is the completest thing of the kind that can be seen. The care as well as taste bestowed in bringing its different points to their present perfection, and in keeping them in that state, is admirable: there is not an object shewn that had been better concealed, nor one concealed that might have been exposed with advantage to the general or particular effect; and we quit this delightful spot with no other regret than that of parting from it. To the English this scene is doubly interesting, from having been one of the favourite haunts of Addison, the most amiable of their writers, and Collins, one of the most poetical of their poets.

Immediately opposite to us, on entering the High Street from Magdalen College, stands the rich rusticated gateway of the Botanic Garden, the handsomest erection of the kind in Oxford. We have not time to enter it now; and indeed it offers no particular objects of attraction within; but the vista through it, as seen from the little outer court, is exceedingly sweet and inviting, and, together with the gateway itself, forms a picture perfect of its kind. An elegant larch stands on each side of the gateway, and a broad venerable yew hedge runs up on each side the walk. These, together with a beautiful pink acacia, some noble old Portugal laurels, and other shrubs, and a lofty poplar spiring up above the whole at the extreme end, complete the scene.

We now find ourselves in what may, upon the whole, be considered as the finest street in Europe, both as regards its particular objects of attraction, and its general effect. The great street at Antwerp is the only one of the kind that can compare with it. Let us walk on as far as the bend, which commences just as we reach the front of Queen's College, and then look around us.

* * *

Here is a sight not to be paralleled at the present day; and, I firmly believe, not to have been much surpassed in ancient times. On the left rises the extensive front of University College; venerable from its aspect, but more so from its associations,—for it may probably be considered as the eldest daughter of *Alma mater*. Opposite to, and finely contrasting with this, is the equally extensive, but entirely modern front of Queen's,—with its rusticated wings enriched with statues and sculptures, and its solid plain screen joining these to an elegant central gateway, surmounted by an open cupola containing a statue of Queen Caroline. A little farther westward stands the simple embattled front of All Souls; and immediately beyond this the exceedingly rich and elaborate front of St. Mary's Church, with its projecting portico, supported by twisted columns, like those in Raphael's cartoon of the Beautiful Gate—its parapet of knotted pinnacles—and its exquisite airy spire, rising out of a cluster of smaller ones, like a lovely young mother with her children round her knees. Immediately beyond St. Mary's, on the same side, stands the sister church of All Saints; the elegant modern spire of which can alone be seen from this point of view.—All the buildings I have now described are seen at one view, from a particular point in the High Street, looking westward; and from the same point, looking in an opposite direction, are seen the queen-like Tower of Magdalen, rising from behind the elms in the front of Magdalen Hall—the Bridge, &c. &c.; the whole forming a scene of stately and impressive beauty not to be conceived of without seeing it, and not to be surpassed. Let us now return to our inn to breakfast, after having thus completed, I hope not uninterestingly, the first portion of our summer's day.

V. S.

LETTER LXVIII.

There are few things pleasanter, upon occasion, than the *regular confusion* of a well-frequented inn, in a populous country town. It keeps speculation perpetually alive. In such a scene the mind can never flag, and can never recoil upon itself. A melancholy man should live in the coffee-room of a country inn, whose windows look to the high street. It is a place exorcised of all bad spirits, except licensed ones: and as these only come when they are called for, we have no right to complain even of them. Here, while discussing our substantial English breakfast of fresh eggs, ham, water-cresses, and coffee—here, while looking out upon the smart shops, the nicely paved streets, and the trim damsels that are pacing them, mixed here and there with the students in their half gallant, half scholar-like attire, let us endeavour to forget, for a time, the splendid scene we have just been contemplating; otherwise we shall not be duly prepared and fitted to appreciate that which is to come: for we have, as yet, had but a slight taste of the architectural as well as picturesque riches of this magnificent spot.

Having forgotten, then, for a moment, if we can, the rich and varied scene just presented to us, let us now look at one altogether different, but still more complete in its kind, and still more impressively beautiful — beautiful to a degree that is nothing less than affecting. Quitting the High Street through the gate of All Souls, we find ourselves in the outer quadrangle of that college. Here we will only notice the gorgeous painted and gilded sun dial, which looks down upon us from the front of the chapel; and which, in the midst of the grey antiquity that surrounds it, looks like a richly jewelled diadem glittering on the forehead of a faded and wrinkled beauty. Passing for a moment out of this square through a low portal on the right, we reach a small inner court, the sweetest of its kind in Oxford—braided all over one side with ivy, from the ground to the summit of the walls—festooned from window to window by various parasite plants, clinging by their tendrils and hanging their gorgeously-tinted leaves up to the very chimney tops;—and below, the star of the jasmine, shining not unheeded, however mild its light. Returning reluctantly from this sweet spot, we pass through another portal into the inner quadrangle. It is to view the unrivalled *coup-d'œil* from the centre of this court that we are here.

Notwithstanding the amazing number of buildings forming this University, we are never tired of looking at them, on account of their infinite variety of form and character: but I fear anything like a detailed description of many of them would very soon have this effect. Still, however, I cannot resist the temptation of endeavouring to convey to you some notion, however indistinct, of the scene which presents itself from the centre of this court; because there is unquestionably nothing of the kind so beautiful in existence. Standing, then, in the centre of the western side of this court, with its emerald carpet of turf spread out at our feet, we see before us two lofty towers, flanked by ranges of buildings which occupy the rest of that side of the square. These towers, though entirely differing from all others in Oxford, are of the most chaste and exquisite beauty. They are square, and consist of three compartments, diminishing in size as they rise above each other; the lower compartment surrounded at the corners by knotted pinnacles, and each finished by a pierced parapet. Between the lower compartment of these towers is the stately entrance to the Common Room; and the ranges of buildings which flank the towers, and complete the side of the square, are supported by rich graduated buttresses, each terminating in a knotted pinnacle rising considerably above the roof. On the opposite side to this runs a plain but elegant colonnade, in the centre of which is a handsomely worked iron gateway, surmounted by a low turret richly ornamented, and taking the form of an imperial crown. The remaining sides of the court consist of uniform ranges of building, pierced by exquisitely-formed pointed windows, and supported at intervals by graduated buttresses, which are, like those on the eastern side, terminated by rich knotted pinnacles.

Thus far of the court, or quadrangle, which consists of buildings forming part of the college itself; and even this may be considered as superior in beauty to any other in Oxford. But, as if to complete and perfect the scene, and render it quite unrivalled, it takes in a view of several of the finest single objects belonging to the University; which seem to look down upon it in silent admiration, as if willingly admitting its claims. At the left corner of the square, looking from the sister towers, rises the sweet spire of St. Mary's Church, and by its side, like a younger sister, that of All Saints. Immediately to the right of the turretted gateway stands the bold and majestic dome of the Radcliffe Library; a little beyond the right hand corner come clustering up the venerable pinnacles of the Schools; and still farther to the right rise a few lofty poplars, that seem to wave their green tops as if keeping a living watch and ward over the ineffable beauty of the scene beneath them. Except the foregoing, and the clouds and sky, not a single object of any kind whatever can be seen from any part of this spot.

Of what remains to fill up the rest of the day, and complete our hasty view of a few of the architectural and natural beauties of Oxford, I shall choose the splendid collection of buildings forming and adjoining to Radcliffe Square—Christ Church, with its noble avenue of elms, and the sweet and romantic walk round its meadow—and lastly, the evening scene on the Isis.

Once more, then, after taking a light repast at our pleasant inn, let us sally forth into the High Street, and passing up on the left by the side of St. Mary's Church, we shall find ourselves in a square open space, the four sides of which are formed by the back of St. Mary's, the front of Brazen-Nose College, one side of the principal quadrangle of

All-Souls, and a portion of that venerable and impressive building called the Schools; and in the centre of this space, detached from any other erection, stands the stately dome of the Radcliffe Library. In order to convey some idea of the unrivalled architectural wealth collected together on this spot, and its immediate vicinity, I will add, that, on passing through the quadrangle of the Schools, you arrive in view of three more of the richest and most characteristic buildings belonging to the University,—viz. the Theatre for examinations, conferring degrees, &c.—the Clarendon Printing-house, and the Ashmolean Museum. That these buildings may be something more to you than a collection of mere names, I shall endeavour to convey to you a slight notion of the character of each; from which it will be seen, that they are as rich in contrast and variety, as they are in every other species of architectural attraction.

For pure and delicate beauty, unquestionably the most conspicuous object in this collection is the back elevation of St. Mary's Church, which forms the southern side of Radcliffe Square. It is a perfectly regular erection, consisting of a rich pointed portal, flanked by three pointed windows to correspond on each side, and surmounted by that lovely spire of which I have spoken before, and which produces so exquisite an effect in all the distant views of the city. The lower series of windows in this front are surmounted by four smaller ones arched in a different manner, and a parapet enriched at intervals by those singular knotted pinnacles which so greatly enhance the general effect of buildings of this kind. Harmonious sweetness is the character of this matchless work. It seems to breathe forth into the surrounding space an air of deep quiet—of imperturbable peace. For perfect beauty, I do not scruple to place it above any other religious temple I have ever seen. Some of the Continental cathedrals may have been equal to it when in their perfect state; but I doubt if they were not all on too large a scale to admit of their possessing that peculiar *sweetness* of expression which belongs to this lovely object.

That portion of All-Souls which forms the eastern side of Radcliffe Square, consists of the screen, gateway, and cupola, which I described in my account of the quadrangle of that magnificent college. Immediately behind this screen rises the singularly beautiful double tower, which I also described. The western side of the square is formed by the front of Brazen-Nose,—a building not claiming very particular attention; though its plainness and sobriety of character are well adapted to contrast with the riches that surround it. The remaining or north side of the square is occupied by an elevation forming one side of the quadrangle of the Schools. This is a building which, from its bare and almost primitive simplicity of character, excites a peculiar interest, in connexion with the venerable associations that belong to it, and in contrast with the rich and almost fantastical variety of ornament by which it is surrounded. Its perfectly flat and unornamented walls, rising immediately out of the earth like the side of a cliff looking to the sea—its plain square windows, as if cut out of its face—and its low simple parapet, directly perpendicular with the line at which the walls rise out of the earth—all this, dark and grey with age, yet firm and unimpaired as if of yesterday, produces a striking and impressive effect.—The Radcliffe Library—which rises in the midst of these buildings, and gives to them, as well as receives from them, a look of grandeur and richness—consists of an elevation which may be regarded as comprising, externally, three compartments; namely, the substructure, which is of rustic work, and of a double octagon form, containing eight open portals, all of which lead to one open vestibule; above this rises the circular hall or chamber containing the library, the outer elevation of which is extremely elegant and well imagined—consisting of couples of Corinthian pillars connecting windows and niches alternately, and supporting a graceful entablature surmounted by an open balustrade;—finally, within the balustrade rises the grave and commanding dome, which is finished by a turret and cupola of appropriate character and dimensions.

One would think that all these structures, grouped together in a space not exceeding that of one of our ordinary squares, presented an assemblage of architectural grandeur and beauty sufficiently imposing. But as if to defy all competition or comparison between similar assemblages elsewhere, there are, added to the group I have just described, three other buildings, each totally different from any of the above-mentioned, and from each other, and each appropriate to its object, and excellent in its kind. These are the Theatre, the Clarendon Printing-house, and the Ashmolean Museum. My space will not allow me to describe these admirable buildings with any minuteness; but an idea of their character and general effect in the picture may be gained by mentioning, that the Theatre is raised on the model, or at least its external elevation is an imitation of, those of the ancients, though of course on a very small scale, and I believe it is the only modern building of its kind;—the Clarendon Printing-house is also a perfectly classical erection, consisting of an elegant Doric portico connecting two uniform wings, and surmounted, at the corners of each pediment,—of which there are four, one over each front,—by statues of the Muses;—the Ashmolean Museum is an elegant modern structure, extremely correct and tasteful in its proportions as well as ornaments, and though of a character different from all the other objects in this group, yet admirably consorting with the whole of them.

We must now abruptly quit this magnificent portion of the city, and repose our senses (almost satiated with the contemplation of architectural grandeur—perhaps on account of its possessing the one sole fault of not being sufficiently, or rather not at all, blended with the beauties of nature) among the sweet yet cheerful stillness of Christ-Church meadows. To this end let us proceed to the western extremity of the High Street, and turning on the left down St. Aldate's Street, we shall presently find ourselves before the most magnificent structure as well as endowment in Oxford. We cannot stay to admire its nobly simple front, or the gorgeous mosque-like towers of its gateway; for we must, if we would do it with proper effect, no longer delay to contrast, as well as combine, the contemplations arising from the scene we have just left, with those which are sure to be suggested by that we are seeking. Passing silently, therefore, through the great quadrangle of Christ's, and the somewhat lumbering, un-uniform, and much too modern one, called Peckwater, and continuing our course to the little meadow in front of vine-covered and ivy-bound Merton, we shall speedily enter " a Temple not made with hands "—" a pillared shade high overarched "—the effect of which, it must be confessed, sinks the works of us mortals into insignificance, and at the same time lifts our thoughts to a height, which their own unassisted power can scarcely enable them to reach.—See!—We stand within the Elm Grove of Christ Church—the grandest of Cathedrals! Between its massy pillars the descending sun darts its slant rays, and the innumerable company of leaves above and about us cast their green and quivering shadows on the natural pavement below. The breeze, perfumed with sweet incense from the field-flowers around, chaunts forth its evening hymn; at intervals pealing along the fretted roof, like a dim organ note, still sounding, after the touch that awakened, has quitted it. Above, the birds flit hither and thither, like attendant spirits of the place. Before us and around, unconscious worshippers pass silently along, their steps solemnized, and their looks lifted upwards, in token of unlifted thoughts.—To give a bare description of this noble spot would be idle, since nothing but being present within its influence can call forth feelings appropriate to its character. Pass we on, then, to another scene, different, and yet alike! —different as a tragedy of Æschylus differs from a pastoral of Tasso—alike, as those two are alike, inasmuch as both are *poetry*. The lovely walk round Christ Church meadow must be very dear to the memory of all who have trod its sweet windings—dear for itself, and dearer for the many pleasant images and associations that the mere recollection of it cannot fail to call forth; but it will not bear much describing—especially after what I have said of a similar walk belonging to Magdalen College. The one before us resembles that in being artificially planted, and raised on the borders of a clear meandering stream; but it differs from that in being much less still and secluded —more open, extensive, and various in the views it affords—and more gay, lively, and picturesque. Including the Elm Walk, it is more than a mile in length; and yet every part of it is kept in the most perfect order. The turf which clothes its sides down to the water's edge is like a velvet carpet—not the smallest tuft of grass is ever seen to disfigure its firm gravelled footway—not a twig of its innumerable shrubs is suffered to grow disorderly, or a plant to wither without having its place instantly supplied. If I were compelled to confine myself to *one* of these walks, I should certainly choose this of Christ Church; yet not without confessing that the other possesses more unity of character, and is upon the whole more unrivalled, consistent, and complete.

We have sauntered under these delightful shades till the evening is closing in upon us, and there is scarcely light enough left to shew us yonder gay and glittering scene on the Isis. It is as if all Oxford were abroad, sporting and making holiday on the bosom of her beautiful river. But it is so every summer evening during Term time. Brightly painted boats of all sizes,—from the eight-oared cutter to the little skiff, small enough to be taken up under the arm of its single occupant,—are skimming the surface of the sun-lit waters. Some of these latter are floating heedlessly along, at "the river's own sweet will," or making their way into secluded nooks, and lingering by the side of emerald banks, while their rapt inmates, perchance smitten with the love of old romance, are slumbering over "this ignorant present," and living a thousand years before they were born. Let us leave them to their imaginations: they cannot be more happy in them than I have been in mine, while thus conjuring up, for you and for myself, another *Summer's Day at Oxford.*

V. S.

LETTER LXIX.

TELL me no more, my dear N——, about the merits of a Republic, and the disadvantages of a Monarchy; talk to me no more of the emptiness of pageantry, the mischiefs of luxury, and the folly of form; let me hear no more facts or arguments to prove that courts are subject to corruptions, that courtiers are liable to duplicity and intrigue, and that kings are not immaculate or immortal any more than other people! Preach to me no more on this most fruitful of subjects, for I am determined before-hand that your enthusiasm and eloquence shall all be thrown away. I shall turn a deaf ear to it all: and you know those who *will* not hear are more deaf than any others. I have seen, and as we say in France, "assisted at" the Coronation of George the Fourth of England; have seen it under every advantage, and have partaken of the banquet that followed it; and henceforth I am prepared to maintain, and even to *argue*, that there is a chord in the human heart which naturally and therefore necessarily thrills and responds to "the pomps and vanities of this wicked world;"

that there is a kind of *Coronation organ* in the human brain, which has not yet been pointed out by Gall and Spurzheim, possibly because it does not become developed till after the patient has assisted at a ceremony of this kind; (and those philosophers were not likely to meet with many such fortunate persons in their researches); but which organ is expressly and exclusively adapted to inspire man with a reverence for legitimate governments, and a firm faith in the "divine right" of kings and Cæsars!

To be serious, I have just witnessed this truly royal and august spectacle; and I assure you that the awful grandeur of the place in which it was exhibited, the complicated and impressive nature of the reflections arising out of the ceremonies performed, and the infinite variety and multitude of the associations connected with the names, offices, and even the habits of the persons who took part in those ceremonies, all conspired to render it a scene which could not be witnessed without deep emotion, and which cannot be remembered without reverence and respect. For my own part, I will candidly confess to you, that I went to this great spectacle with a disposition to think lightly of such things, and I shall, therefore, readily forgive the ridicule of those who were not present at it; but I shall never hear such spectacles spoken of slightingly by those who *were* present at this, without feelings of suspicion, if not contempt.

We were so fortunate as to procure three peers' tickets, for one of the best situations in the Abbey, and we went their leisurely, about half-past seven in the morning—making our way through ranks of persons who had been in their places for hours, if not days and nights, and for whom, accordingly, we felt no little share of contemptuous pity!

On arriving at the Abbey, nearly all who had seats there were already occupying them; so that this first subject of observation presented itself to us in its complete state at once: and it was far from being unimpressive. There was an air of anxious yet satisfied and sedate expectation about every thing—animate as well as inanimate—which was very characteristic. All present were sure that they should see every thing which took place, and therefore they were satisfied to wait; but no one very well knew what *would* take place, and therefore all were anxious that it should begin. Meantime the persons in official situations were passing and repassing in all parts of the scene, giving or receiving directions, or fulfilling the duties of their various stations.

Here a page, in the simple but graceful costume of a cavalier's frock of blue, with white sash and ruff, a black Spanish hat and feathers, white rosettes to his knees and shoes, and a wand of office, was conducting a bevy of peeresses to their seats; there a herald, in his splendidly embroidered tabard or surcoat, was passing to and fro on the floor of the theatre, or centre part of the choir. In one part, a knot of richly attired military officers were conversing (silently) on the approaching events of the day; in another, a group of plumed ladies were consulting (doubtless) on where they had best place themselves finally, in order at once to receive lustre from the scene, and to impart it. All this gave a life and motion to the coup-d'œil which was highly characteristic and interesting. You are to understand the scene of which I am now speaking as being that in which all the ceremonies of the actual coronation took place; namely, that part of the Abbey comprised within the choir, and consisting of the approach to the sacrarium from the grand aisle—the sacrarium itself—the stage on which the throne stands—and the north and south transepts. To all these parts, even up to the very throne and the altar, the bearers of privileged tickets had free access, until almost immediately before the arrival of the procession; when these parts were of course cleared, as they were to be occupied by the persons forming a portion of it, and engaged in the various ceremonies.

During the whole of the time of which I have now been speaking, there was a perpetual hum of hushing sounds, all of which seemed to have some relation to silence, and which never for a moment disturbed it. The spectators conversed in silence; the footsteps fell in silence on the cloth, or matting; the sounds that came from without,—of the bells pealing, the bands playing, and even of the people shouting,—were all subdued and mellowed into a kind of silence. And, in the inanimate objects which belonged to the scene, there was an air of silence, that harmonized finely with the whole. The splendid roof of the building seemed to hang over the scene, in a meditative silence; the gorgeous windows poured in their coronation light, in a glowing silence; the solemn pillars stood overlooking the whole, in a stern and religious silence; and the throne stood by itself in the midst, in a golden silence, as if conscious of its office and expectant of its august occupier! If all this seems fanciful to you, who did not witness the scene of which I am attempting to convey the *spirit* merely, you will, I am sure, have the candour to suspect that it is *because* you were not present that it seems so. At all events, you will remember that I do not profess to describe the mere detail, or to offer to your inspection *wood-cuts* of the scene.

You are to consider the foregoing as applying to the scene in the choir of Westminster Abbey, up to about half-past ten o'clock. I should mention, however, that up to this time, all the seats immediately adjoining the theatre, sacrarium, &c. had remained unoccupied,— being appropriated to persons forming part of the procession; and also, that numerous other parts of the different boxes and galleries were in the same situation,— the persons entitled to these seats choosing to remain in Westminster Hall, to see the different portions of the procession assemble.—At about half-past ten, the scene in the choir assumed a totally different appearance. A single gun was heard to fire without; trumpets sounded to announce that the procession was commencing; the soldiers, who had been reposing on their stations in the aisle of the Abbey, were roused and called to arms; and in less than a quarter of an hour, as if by magic, all the hitherto vacant seats, in the galleries and different departments of the Abbey, were filled with the most splendid show of females that perhaps ever graced a ceremony of this or any other kind.

This latter incident produced an effect delightful to be felt, and never to be forgotten; but not to be described. Perhaps nothing was ever witnessed calculated to excite sensations so like those which we connect with scenes of enchantment—for it all took place quite unexpectedly, without the slightest appearance of confusion, and in perfect silence. The attention was, for a moment, called away from the scene before it by the signal gun, the sound of the soldiers in the outer aisle grounding their arms, and the shouting of the people without; and when it returned, the scene had totally changed: the numerous rows of seats, hitherto vacant, were now filled with all the beauty of the land,—no one knowing whence it came and how it got there,—but only that there it was! I know of nothing in poetry equal to the effect produced by this change. There is something resembling it in Scott's "Lady of the Lake," where the clan of Rhoderic Dhu, who have been concealed behind the clumps of dark green heath, start up in a moment at the whistle of their leader, and the whole scene changes as if by magic, into a band of armed warriors, with gay tartans and glittering spears.

. . . .

In about half an hour from this time the great western door of the Abbey was thrown open, and the procession began to enter. Those who had seats in the choir, and who did not choose to risk leaving them, had no opportunity of witnessing the procession up the great aisle. But those who had been reconnoitering during the course of the morning, and who saw the perfect facility there was in passing from any one part of the choir to any other, had an opportunity of seeing the procession, *as* a procession, and then of returning to their seats and seeing the performance of the various ceremonies. By the good management of M—— we happened to be among this fortunate number. I shall, however, not give you any detail of the procession, as you have, no doubt, had an opportunity (of which you have *not* availed yourself) of reading it in the public journals; but shall return at once to the interior of the choir—merely saying, that the procession itself was arranged and conducted throughout with admirable regularity and decorum; and there can be little doubt that it was at least as splendid and perfect in its kind as any pageant that ever took place in modern Europe.

Returning, at the close of the procession, from the outer gallery to the choir, the scene was again changed from what we had left it, and had received its full and splendid completion. The seats on the south side of the sacrarium were occupied by the Princesses of the Royal House; the whole of the lower seats in the north and south transepts, by the Dukes, Marquesses, and Peers; those in the avenue immediately adjoining the outer aisle by the Judges and law officers, Knights commanders, &c. of the Bath and Garter, the royal household, &c.; and the whole of the hitherto vacant space in the centre part of the choir, immediately surrounding the steps of the throne, by the great officers who had stations and duties immediately about the King's person. The whole now presented a scene of gorgeous splendour, and yet of perfect decorum, which, aided by the burst of music and of human voices on the entrance of the King, was nothing less than sublime. The King, on his entrance into the body of the choir, was deeply agitated, and evidently very nearly overcome, either by fatigue or feeling. He almost immediately retired through a recess on the left of the altar, while preparations were making for the commencement of the ceremonies.

The King's return from his temporary retirement, was a signal for the greatest stir and bustle among all the officers immediately employed in the ceremonies; and every person present seemed delighted to notice the striking change which had taken place in his Majesty's appearance during his absence. He went out pale, trembling, and almost overcome; and returned refreshed, and apparently in full strength and spirits, to go through his arduous labour; for nothing less than labour it must have been.

The RECOGNITION,—or presenting the king to his people by the Archbishop of Canterbury,—was the first ceremony. The reception this ceremony met with,—like every other in which it was the cue of the persons present to take a part,—was quite cordial, but not enthusiastic. Perhaps this may be fairly attributed to the habits and station of the persons present, and not to any want of personal respect for their sovereign.

The next ceremony was that of the OFFERING. Then followed the SERVICE. Immediately the King was seated in the chair of state, which stood on the south side of the sacrarium, he earnestly and repeatedly spoke to the persons who were near him, directing and motioning them to move from between him and the altar, the view of which they intercepted from him. During the anthem, which preceded this, he invariably motioned in unison with the *time* of the music; and during the reading of the service, he never failed to repeat the responses, with much apparent earnestness.

The SERMON, by the Archbishop of York, followed. It was delivered with great solemnity and propriety of voice and gesture, and the King paid marked attention to it; signifying from time to time, by his manner and deportment, the occasional approval, (and, as I once or twice seemed to observe, the *dis*-approval) with which he received the different parts of it: and he once or twice turned to those who were close to him, and seemed to make some direct *remarks* on it. If, imperfectly as I was enabled to hear the sermon, I were compelled to make any observations on the matter of it, I should say that it struck me as being exactly such a composition as might have been expected, considering the party from whom it proceeded, and the audience to which it was addressed. It was, in some parts, bold without being rash; and in others, courtly without being servile. The general propositions it contained were true and incontrovertible, and were enforced with the manner and in the language of a man anxious to impress on the sovereign the duties of his station; but the particular applications of those general propositions were narrow and confined, and in some parts more than questionable; and they were enforced with the (perhaps, unconscious) feelings of a man, if too high in station to be injured by the frown of his sovereign, yet not beyond the reach of his grace and favour. Such, at least, was the feeling with which my imperfect hearing of the composition in question impressed me.

Of the various ceremonies which followed, tween the Sermon and the Crowning, I have littl nothing to tell you. They were gone through consecutively, and with scarcely any pause between them; though they occupied a very considerable time. At different intervals, during these ceremonies, hymns and anthems were sung by the choristers; but, as it seemed to me, very inefficiently, compared with what I had anticipated respecting this part of the service, and with what might easily have been produced. The boys belonging to the choir were evidently not sufficiently practiced in their parts. This was the only defect that I observed, throughout the whole arrangements of the day.

Nothing particular occurred worthy of notice, till the CROWNING,—the recognition of which by the people produced a very fine and animating effect; their long continued shouts being accompanied by the sound of numerous trumpets within the church, and of artillery without. An entirely new feature was also given to the scene, by the dukes, peers, bishops, heralds, &c. putting on their coronets and caps.

The rest of the ceremonies being gone through, at about half-past three the King again retired for a few minutes, through the recess on the side of the altar. During this interval the seats which had been occupied by the peeresses, and others who had pass tickets to the Hall, were vacated as quickly and as silently as they had been filled; and, on the King's re-appearance, the procession immediately began to move on its return to the Hall.

We were now permitted to join in the procession among the foreign ambassadors, &c., and almost close to the King's person. This gave us an opportunity of witnessing the countless multitudes of persons collected on the outside of the Abbey, and which formed not the least splendid and animating part of the pageant. Every spot from which a sight could be obtained was of course crowded; and the persons present were almost all from respectable classes of life, and elegantly dressed: for the mere *populace* were attracted to various distant parts of the suburbs, by the fêtes and exhibitions of different kinds which had been prepared for their entertainment.

I observed that the reception the King met with from this mixed multitude of his subjects, was much of the same character with that which greeted him from the select body within the Abbey and Hall: it was perfectly cordial, but not enthusiastic. But perhaps there was nothing conclusive in even this; for I doubt whether a mixed body of well-dressed Englishmen and women can be moved to enthusiasm by any earthly combination of circumstances.

From the religious nature of the ceremonies performed in the Abbey, you will judge that the spirit of every thing which took place there was of a solemn and impressive kind. The scene which persented itself on entering the Banquet Hall formed a striking contrast to that which we had just left; and the effect of each heightened and illustrated that of the other. This gorgeous, stately, and spirit-stirring sight was probably never surpassed, even in the best days of that chivalry of which it presented, from beginning to end, not an imitation but a revival. That it *was* a revival of the manners and customs of those romantic, and in many respects, glorious times, was, no doubt, the secret spring of those feelings with which it inspired all who witnessed and partook in it. To have seen precisely the same ceremonies performed on the stage, by persons merely wearing the same dresses, and calling themselves by the same names and titles with those who officiated on the occasion, would have been tame, tedious, and spiritless—a sight for servants and children. But *this* was the thing itself. The Hall was that very Hall in which a whole line of kings have received the *élite* of their subjects—the person wearing the crown was *indeed* the monarch of a great and powerful nation—the princes, peers, barons, knights, and squires, had a real claim to the names and titles they bore, and their veins ran with the real blood of all the ancient chivalry of the land,—of those who figured in all the tilts and tournaments of France and England, and fought, bled, and died on the fields of Cressy, of Agincourt, of Poictiers, and of the Holy Land;—and the females, who gave the finishing grace and character to this resplendent scene, were the actual inheritors of the names and charms of those very beauties whose smiles and sighs were the only guerdon sought by valour and virtue—from whom a scarf or a glove was at once the strongest incitement to glorious deeds, and their best reward.

In speaking of this scene, any more than of the one we have just left, I shall not enter into minute details; because I think that anything of this kind, relating to a scene that one can never actually see, does but mislead the imagination instead of assisting it. I will, however, try to give you a general idea of the coup-d'œil which presented itself on entering the grand Banquet Hall, to which the procession proceeded on leaving the Abbey. This Hall is of an oblong square form, and is said to be the largest chamber in Europe which is unsupported by pillars. First of all, then, you are to fancy the bare Hall, with its noble gothic roof, and its immense painted window at either end. Look at it for a moment in this state, and then let us proceed to dress and adorn it for the present occasion. First, let the floor be covered with fine blue cloth, and up the centre let there be a broad stripe of royal purple, of the same material. On each side of the Hall, up to nearly the top, let there be placed banquetting-tables, covered with all the adornments and refections appropriate to the first festival given by a monarch to his assembled nobles; and on a raised platform covered with Persian carpet, at the end of the Hall, let there be the royal table itself, placed cross-wise, covered with royal purple cloth embossed with gold, and loaded with massive dishes, plates, cups, and table furniture of every kind, all of gold. In the centre of this table, looking down the vacant centre of the Hall, place the Throne, or royal chair of state, like its accompanying ornaments, all gold. Above the side tables, at a considerable height, and projecting from the sides of the Hall, place galleries for the spectators, two on each side, above but not *over* each other,—the upper one receding amphitheatrically; and at the hither end or entrance of the Hall, a music gallery, with seats, stands, &c. piled above each other up to the ceiling. In front of these galleries, ranged in opposite lines, and immediately over the banquetting tables, let there be suspended from the roof about thirty immense circular chandeliers, filled with wax lights in circles, rising conically, circle above circle. In this arrangement I have forgotten the seats for the females of the Royal House. These were placed opposite to either end of the royal table, and most splendidly fitted up with canopies, hangings, &c. I ask you now for a moment to look at all these different objects, in what may be called their inanimate state; with the seats for spectators, the body of the Hall, the banquetting-tables, and the Throne itself, *all empty*, and the chandeliers unlighted. Now shut your eyes for a moment, as the children do at the theatre when the scene is going to change. Now open them again, and behold! The chandeliers are pouring forth a blaze of light, and the day-light has departed as if conquered and put to flight. The seats are all filled by their appointed occupiers;—the throne by a Monarch, whose looks and motions grace it right royally—the separate seats at the royal table by the Princes of the royal blood—those at the side tables by the nobility of the land—the lower galleries by the wives and daughters of that nobility—the upper ones by the gentry of England, collected together from her remotest quarters—and the floor and body of the Hall alive and swarming (as the bees do, in a kind of orderly confusion) with official attendants of every kind and degree,—from the lord high steward, who seemed to be gifted with a ubiquity of presence, and was to be seen every where, down to the royal servants, who, for once in their lives, seemed to know themselves for persons of no note or consideration, in a company where peers took the place of servitors, and barons did not disdain to be the bearers of basins and ewers! Do not forget to fancy all the persons who compose this resplendent company, dressed in all the gorgeous and at the same time graceful magnificence, belonging to those chivalrous times of which this scene was a worthy revival, and I think your realizing imagination will be able to form no faint picture of the coup-d'œil which presented itself to my delighted and almost bewildered senses, on entering the Banquet Hall of Westminster, on the Coronation of George IV. of England.

Of the various forms and ceremonies which took place during the Banquet, I shall have little to tell you; for even that of the Champion's entry, his challenge, &c. though by far the most striking of the whole, disappointed me considerably. It was altogether a theatrical exhibition, and yet it was not conducted with a view to theatrical effect. Between the first and second courses the hall doors are thrown open, and the Champion enters in complete armour, and on horseback, attended by the Duke of Wellington and the Marquis of Anglesey. But instead of riding in boldly and *championly*, they come in mincingly, and at a foot-pace; and all three seem to occupy their seats in fear and trembling, as if they expected the floor would give way under them. Immediately on entering the Hall they stop, and a herald reads the Champion's challenge, daring any one to single combat who may dispute the title of George IV. as rightful sovereign of the realm. This is repeated in the centre of the Hall, and again at the top, close to the royal table; the Champion each time dashing his glove of mail on the floor. The king then drinks to the Champion's health, and presents him with the gold cup, with which he retires, backing his horse the whole way down the centre of the Hall. I cannot help thinking that either this ceremony should have been dispensed with altogether, or it should have been conducted as it no doubt was during the times in which it originated. At all events the Champion and his attendants should either have *walked* into the Hall, leaving their steeds outside, or they should have rode in fearlessly, and not as if they were remembering at every step that their horses were treading on boards and broad cloth.

In fact, the mere ceremonies which took place in the Hall during the different intervals of the banquet, exhibited little to interest either the senses or the imagination. Many of them were puerile in themselves, or had become quite obsolete through the lapse of time and the changes in manners and society; and all of them, compared with those which took place in the Abbey, were trifling and unattractive. At least, speaking for myself, they were quite unable to withdraw my attention for a moment from the chivalrous and inspiring scene which was lying before it *as a whole*, or even from many separate parts of that scene:—From the crowned monarch of a great nation, sitting at the head of his Banquet-table, and entertaining the greatest of that nation; from all the Beauty of a land where beauty certainly abounds more than in any other, collected together, arrayed in its most resplendent attire, and beaming forth more than its most courtly looks;—for the novelty and interest of the scene gave an intensity of expression to most of the female faces, which courtly breeding does not permit on common occasions, and which, if it did permit, habit would prevent from being called forth. I say, the ceremonies during the Banquet could scarcely for a moment withdraw my attention from these objects and the reflections arising out of them, or even from others which presented themselves as the minor parts of the scene; still less from the scene itself, as a whole, or from the host of brilliant and spirit-stirring associations which it either called forth from the recesses of time, or created anew, or with which it peopled the vistas of an unknown futurity.

About eight o'clock the King left the banquet-table, and retired from the scene altogether; and then, after a short period of busy, whispering silence, during which none either of the guests or attendants seemed very well to know what it was their cue to do, the Peers gradually disappeared from their seats at the tables, all the females of high rank quitted the galleries, and those who had hitherto been merely spectators of the scene descended into the body of the Hall, and were permitted to partake of the remains of the Banquet, and were supplied with any kind of wine or refreshment for which they asked. Suddenly, and yet without the slightest appearance of haste or confusion, or without any one seeming to be aware of what was going forward, all the seats at the different tables were filled by splendidly dressed females, with their male attendants either waiting on them, or partaking with them of what was on the board. For my own part, long before I was aware that anything was taking place, it had all *taken* place; and I had only just time to compass a few scraps. These—with excellent wine "à discretion"—enabled me to go through the fatigues of the day without flagging for a moment, and gave me spirit to follow the example of hosts of others, and carry away an ornamental fragment as a trophy of the occasion; which I shall preserve while I live, in memory of one of the most impressive, resplendent, and inspiring sights that ever was, and I am persuaded, ever will be seen.

V. S.

FINIS.

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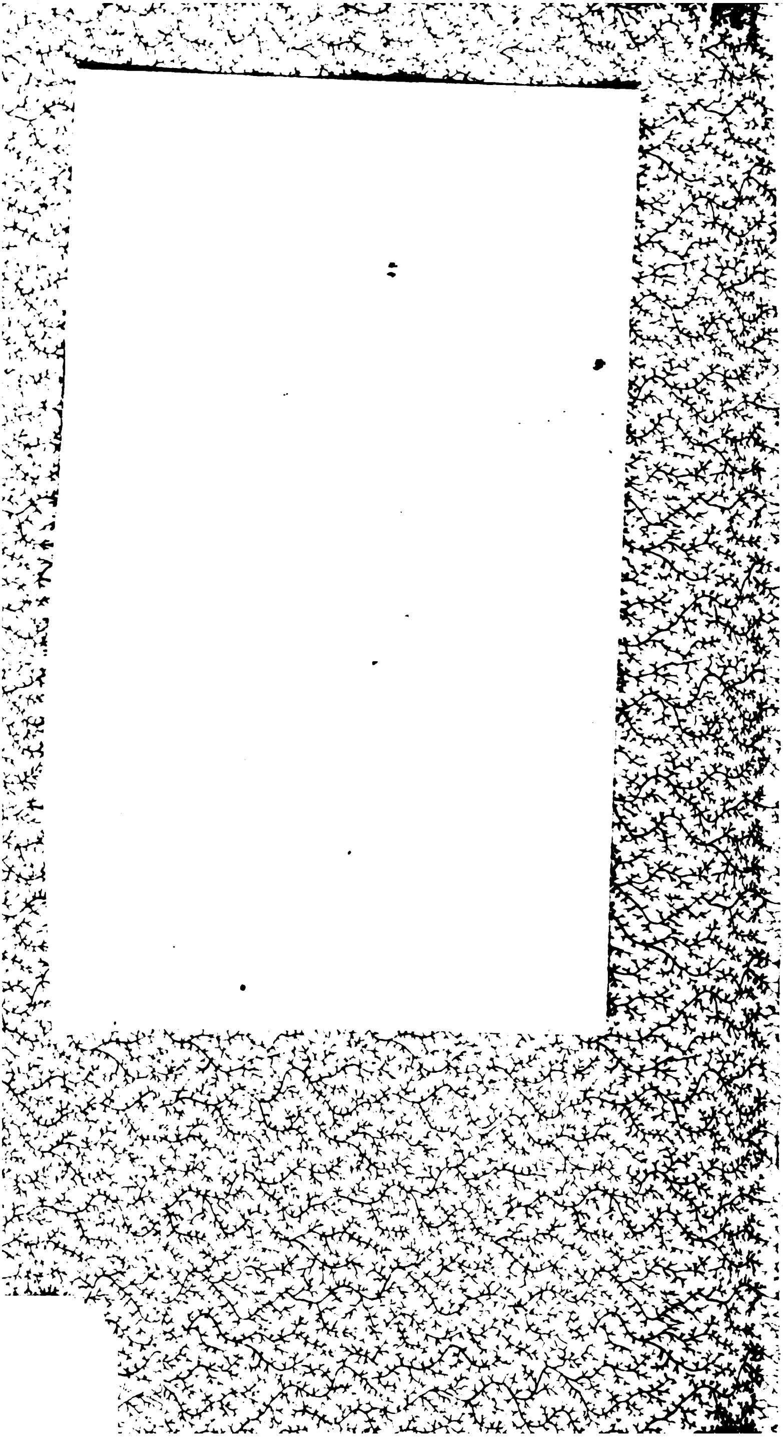

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